



AMERICAN FILM

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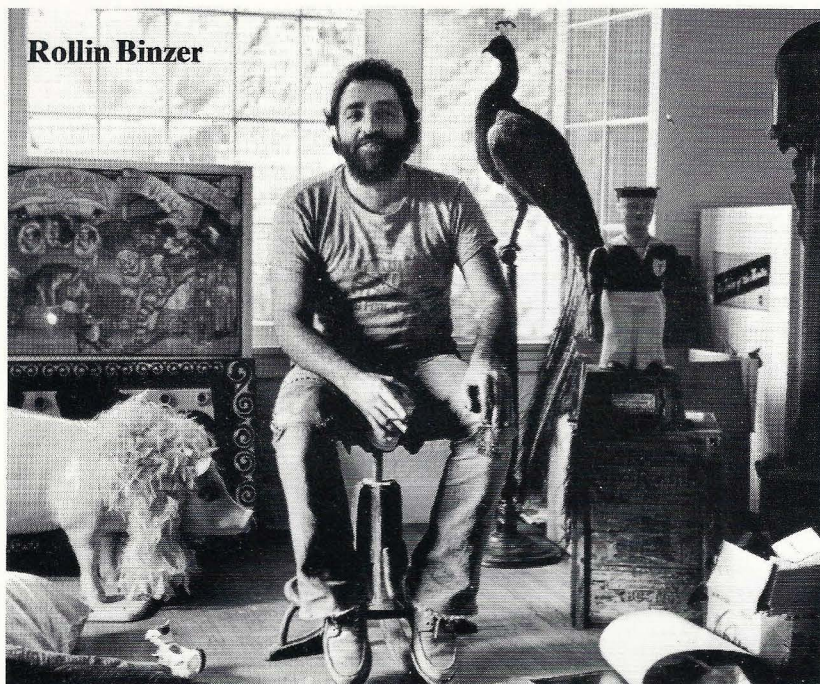
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**Public Television's
Big Splash**

Behind
"The Adams Chronicles"

MAKING IT IN FILM

Rollin Binzer



The following is an interview with Rollin Binzer, Director and Co-producer (with Bob Freeze and others) of "Ladies & Gentlemen: The Rolling Stones." The interviewer shall remain Nameless.

N. We heard that working with the Stones on your movie was an experience in futility—that the Stones would cancel recordings the morning after or they'd come and forget why they were there. And that they'd disappear for weeks leaving you and Freeze waiting in London to hear whether they wanted to do the movie or not.

We heard that the movie was finally OK'd by default. That no one said no, and they knew they were paying expenses and session bills for something.

R.B. Yeah.

N. Is it true another director's movie of the same tour finally got shelved because he got tired of waiting for the Stones to say yes or no or show up, and he finally left town?

R.B. Sort of.

N. So you outwaited him?

R.B. Yes.

N. Is it true there's no clear chain of command in the Stones' organization? That there's no manager, but just The Prince, their money guy, and the lawyers, and the head of the record company, but not an actual manager. So when some-

body says "the Stones" want this, or "the Stones" don't want that, it's really a myth?

R.B. That's right.

N. Does that mean they speak for themselves?

R.B. No.

N. Do things only get done by a sort of general drift by the Stones and their organization towards this point or that, or by Mick or Keith or one of the others saying yes or no? Can any of them make a decision, or only Mick?

R.B. Keith if he cares; otherwise Mick does it.

N. So it was Mick who finally OK'd your film, or did it just happen in spite of them all?

R.B. Keith wanted to help us. Mick went along, with a lot of passive resistance.

N. Why resistance? Is it true he thought his act was embarrassing, in such larger-than-life clarity, on the big screen?

R.B. Yes. He never saw it all from a seat before. He was afraid he would bore people.

N. What convinced him to let it out?

R.B. His chauffeur liked it.

N. I think the mixes are better than any mixes of the same songs on the records, or what you hear at a live show. Did the Stones like the sound?

R.B. Keith liked it a lot, after he helped us get it dirty enough.

N. I heard the Stones weren't as interested in having a concert movie as in your quadrasonic concept, a tour carrying all those speakers around and everything. Is that true?

R.B. Maybe.

N. The editing is very controversial, against a lot of people's idea of what editing should be or can do. But I think it's supportive to the mood and rhythms of the music so that the movie is really about the music and not like a newsreel of a concert. Did you have anyone in the Stones organization exerting quality control on editing, or who was even aware that there was editing being done, or that it mattered?

R.B. At one point Mick said, "This is the best editing I've ever seen. Who did this?" And once Keith said, "It's better than the Partridge Family."

N. A lot of reviewers have been impressed with the whole thing, but insist it's not a movie and complain it's not a live concert. In a sense it's the most pure document I've ever seen, without any intellectual intrusions on the amazing filmic reality. And it documents something I've never seen before—the thing you hear on good albums of good musicians doing their music. But I hear the Academy Awards people thought it wasn't a documentary since it took no point of view and had no sociological perspective. Are you surprised at all this?

R.B. No.

N. The quality of the print is superb. The picture is strong enough to support the hugeness of the sound. Your optical house said it was one of the best 16 to 35 mm blowups that was ever done. What was the secret?

R.B. Eastman color negative II film.



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American Film

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Contents

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Public Television's Big Splash 7
Behind "The Adams Chronicles"

Bruce Cook

A Dickens Garland 14
The Collected Film Works Reassessed

Michael Pointer

Television as Dream 20
An Introduction to Psychoanalysis of the Medium

Peter Wood

1939: A Very Good Year 24
Not Only the Year of GWTW

Larry Swindell

The Yellow Ball Workshop 49
Where Children Create Films

Patrick McGilligan

The Glory That Was Hollywood 52
The Place Has a New Trend—Itself

Joseph McBride

The Rise and Fall of the Rock Film 58
Part II: From *Woodstock* to *Stardust*

Thomas Wiener

Dialogue on Film 33
Robert Towne

The Greystone Seminar—a continuing series of discussions between AFI Fellows and prominent filmmakers.

Festival Report 2
Telluride, A Lively Ghost Town

Michael Webb

McMurtry on the Movies 4
The Deadline Syndrome

Larry McMurtry

Explorations 64
Satellite Entertainment

Robert Carroll

Member News 67

Mel Konecuff

Focus on Education 70
The Deadliest Art

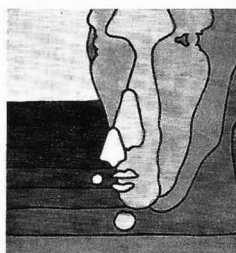
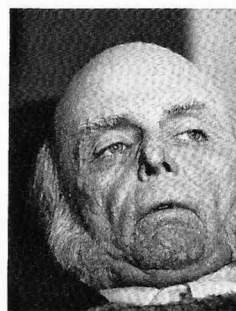
Richard Thompson

Books 73
The Flash of Recognition
The Bottom of the Bill
Consciousness Rising

Adolph Green
William Routt
Joan Mellen

Periodicals 79

Antonio Chemasi



Telluride

Michael Webb

Lively Ghost Town

The motto of architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, "less is more," could well apply to the Telluride Film Festival, which celebrated its second birthday over the Labor Day weekend. Three hundred film buffs ascended to this restored mining town, high in the Rocky Mountains, to hear Henry King, Werner Herzog, and Jack Nicholson, and to see a crazy quilt of movies.

The Telluride Festival is the creation of theater owner Bill Pence, assisted by James Card, film curator at Eastman House, and Tom Luddy of the Pacific Film Archive. The first festival attracted national attention for the wrong reason: a media-inflated dispute over the participation of Leni Riefenstahl. In fact, no festival was freer of the acrimony and politics which so often afflict the big international events; and this year's was a no less joyful event.

Telluride itself comprises a few straggly blocks of clapboard houses in a box canyon, eighty-five hundred feet up and dwarfed by the San Juan mountains. A gold rush town, it produced minerals worth millions of dollars, and supported a hundred saloons around the turn of the century. (Butch Cassidy launched his career by robbing the San Miguel Valley Bank in 1886; William Jennings Bryan made his "Cross of Gold" speech in front of the Sheridan Hotel in 1903.) Telluride never became a ghost town—the mines are still active—but it slumbered through most of the twentieth century until, three years ago, it was discovered simultaneously by ski promoters and by kids from New York and California in search of Shangri La. Both groups struck gold. The skiing promises to rival the best in the West; the kids revitalized the town,

restoring the hotel, shops, and restaurants. The population—down from a peak of five thousand—is now eleven hundred and growing. In essence, it's the evolution of the American frontier all over again. The Sheridan Hotel bar vibrates to hard rock rather than to a player piano and gun shots; but, in back, the dining room has a restored nineteenth-century elegance with paneled walls and with waitresses in Victorian dresses.

Major festival events are presented in the 250-seat Opera House, lovingly restored to its former glories; repeats and retrospectives in two smaller auditoria. Each of the three principal guests was honored by a special program, and at an outdoor seminar the following day.

Henry King, still flying his own plane at eighty-five, recalled an epic Hollywood career, spanning fifty years and over 150 films. His achievement as a director epitomized the virtues of unpretentious craftsmanship, creating memorable sequences from raw material which was of-

Festival Report

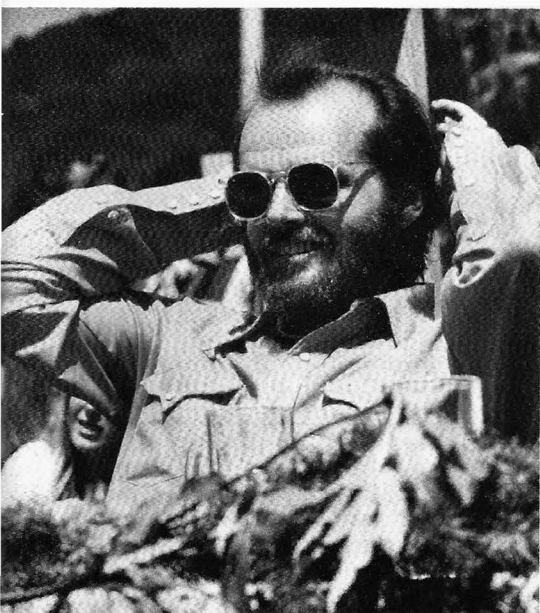
ten undistinguished. As James Card remarked in his introduction, "Henry King contributed so many films to the history of cinema and achieved so many popular successes that, through the last decades of his activity, his skill was largely taken for granted. The stature of the peaks he reached was not obvious because of the towering height of the whole range of his work." The film clips confirmed this judgment; from the extraordinary flood sequence in the 1926 *The Winning of Barbara Worth*, through the loving observation of small-town America in *State Fair* (1933), to the quiet distinction of *The Gunfighter* (1950). King began as an actor in 1913, but he refuses to retire and looks forward to making another film, on the history of Mexico.

If King is half-forgotten by contemporary moviegoers, the German director Werner Herzog is only beginning to be discovered. His sixth and latest feature, *Every Man for Himself and God Against All*, was a big success at Cannes, and

deserves wide distribution in the United States. But his earlier work has hardly been shown in this country. At thirty-two, Herzog merits acclaim for his artistic achievement, as well as for the toughness and courage against odds, which have put him in the forefront of European cinema. He wrote his first script at seventeen, telephoned a producer and persuaded him to back it, but when the two met, Herzog was rejected as being too young. For two years he worked nights in a steel mill to earn the money to make the film himself, while continuing at school during the day. Prizes for that first feature, *Signs of Life*, allowed him to continue, and he traveled into the Sahara Desert to make *Fata Morgana*. A coup d'état in the Cameroons caused his arrest; the horrors of near-death in jail found a terrifying outlet in his next feature, *Even Dwarfs Started Small*. Later he made *Aguirre, Wrath of God* in Peru, a dazzling evocation of a doomed conquistador expedition to discover El Dorado. The film has played for over six months at a leading Paris cinema; in this country no one has bought it for distribution.

Herzog's latest film, *Every Man for Himself*, is both a wry satire on bourgeois values and a poetic fantasy to be compared with F. W. Murnau. Its story—of a wild child, Kaspar Hauser, who mysteriously appeared in nineteenth-century Nuremberg, and was painfully educated in the manners of civilized society—has similarities to that of François Truffaut's *L'Enfant Sauvage*. But Truffaut's film was finally in the French spirit of Reason; Herzog's evokes a darker more mystical tradition. Hopefully it will be widely seen, but as Buck Henry remarked in the discussion which followed its showing: The mass public is conditioned to see commercial films by intensive promotion. If Universal Pictures were to take the Herzog picture, they would present it as an erotic murder mystery: "Who Killed Kaspar Hauser—and Why?" Herzog is a sanguine man with no such expectations. For him art is self-sufficient; "money lost, a film gained."

Jack Nicholson was as laconic off-screen as on, frustratingly reticent (or modest) about his spectacular emergence from a decade of terrible parts in forgettable B-pictures to become one of the most important contemporary American screen actors. Ivan Passer, the émigré Czech director, who in happier times scripted Milos Forman's films and made *Intimate Lighting*, was more revealing. Asked about his new picture *Ace Up My Sleeve*, a commercial caper shot in Austria with Omar Sharif and Karen Black, he described it as a rescue job, and told how he had to accept the assignment before he was shown the script. It proved to be unfilmable; the rewrite proved diffi-



A relaxed Jack Nicholson fields questions at an informal outdoor seminar.

cult, and the first day of shooting found Passer unready and a huge crew awaiting him. "It was a cloudless day in this Alpine valley," he recounted, "and I felt I was having a nightmare. Everyone was ready except me. I looked into the sky and said 'do something.' Ten minutes later it began snowing, and the storm continued for two days. No one could move, and I was able to rewrite the script."

The rest of the festival program was no less eclectic. Albert Johnson presented a hilarious review of the American musical, complete with his own rendition of "Shuffle Off to Buffalo" and a brilliant pastiche of Ruby Keeler's dancing in *No, No, Nanette*. Stan Brakhage introduced an anthology of poetic films, and a program of work by and with two American independents, James Broughton and Sidney Peterson. Karen Arthur's *Legacy* and Joan Silver's *Hester Street* received ovations. *Legacy* is a tour de force scripted by actress Joan Hotchkiss. It is about an affluent Pasadena housewife who moves from nervous insecurity to the brink of madness. Karen Arthur directed and produced the film on a shoe-string budget. Already it has won festival prizes in Europe and promises to achieve a great reputation in the United States.

Joan Micklin Silver's *Hester Street* is even more remarkable, was described in detail in October's *American Film*, and is now being released in various cities.

Two other anthologies formed an epitaph for the old Hollywood. "In Memoriam: Technicolor" marked the ending

last year of the dye-transfer (or inhibition) process that not only made possible the greatest achievements of color cinematography, but was the only color process yet devised that preserved the original color values for more than a few years. A comparison of excerpts from a 1939 Technicolor print of *Gone With the Wind* and a recent Eastmancolor copy demonstrated how great the loss will be. The audience which saw such extraordinary examples of Technicolor as the 1935 *Becky Sharp*, the 1936 *Garden of Allah* and the 1939 *Four Feathers*, felt as though it were drinking the last of an extraordinary vintage, with nothing but *vin ordinaire* to follow. As John Belton wrote in a recent *Village Voice* article, the process is now widely employed only in England, Italy, and China, so that spaghetti westerns and documentaries on acupuncture will have better color values and stay fresh longer than major American features.

Kenneth Anger's program, "Hollywood Babylon," was an event that only a festival like Telluride could have sponsored. A seven-hour anthology of clips and features which began at midnight and ended over breakfast (to which Anger entertained seventy hardy spectators), it revealed, as did his book, the extraordinary gulf between the public image and private reality of Hollywood. While studio publicists dreamt up wholesome fantasies about their stars—which were devoutly believed by their millions of fans—many of the people behind the myth drank themselves into a stupor, and took drugs so freely that Douglas Fairbanks could play a character called Coke Enyday as an in-joke for the amusement of his Sennett colleagues.

Last year's festival brought together a group of film programmers and theater owners who subsequently formed the Association of Specialized Film Exhibitors. It's a tribute to the festival and its setting that such an initiative should flourish so rapidly. This year, inspiration was turned into practical debate, as twenty-five members of ASFE, from nearly every major American city, met for their first general meeting and grappled with the problems of increasing the circulation of quality films, of exchanging ideas and information, and of fostering cooperation among exhibitors, locally and nationally. The number of art houses has dwindled alarmingly in the last few years; museums have often failed to assume a major role in increasing public appreciation of the art of cinema. ASFE brings together the leaders in both areas and offers to strengthen and enlarge quality film exhibition.

Michael Webb is Film Programming Manager of the AFI Theater.

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McMurtry on the Movies

The Deadline Syndrome

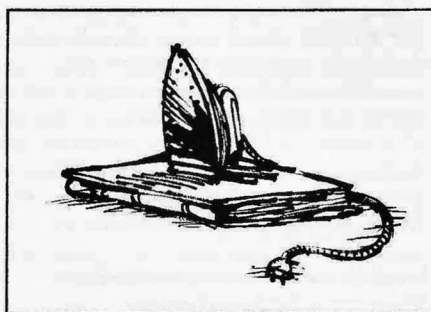
Larry McMurtry

When I was invited to Hollywood to try out for the scriptwriting job on *The Last Picture Show*, I was both uninformed and unenthusiastic. Hollywood had been buzzing in my ear for years, but nothing really interesting had ever happened, and not much money had made its way from them to me. Still, I was broke at the time, and not much is better than not any, so I went—though I was surprised by the invitation. Somebody—the production manager on *Hud*, I believe—had told me years before that producers hated to hire writers to script their own books, for the obvious reason that writers might be expected to retain proprietary feelings about the story. Even if these feelings were long dormant, the normal work of moviemaking—in which skin colors, locales, and sometimes even the sex of characters might have to be changed—could cause them to reawaken, in which case hurt feelings and costly squabbles might result.

Of course, on my first visit, there was no hint of trouble. Indeed, there was never to be any trouble, on any visit. In all these years the worst humiliation I've ever been able to collect in Hollywood, is that once Bert Schneider didn't speak to me in an elevator. I took it hard at the time, but have since come to believe that it was only because he was in a drugged state and mistook me for the elevator boy. Bert was executive producer on *The Last Picture Show*, and on that first visit Bert and his wife with Peter Bogdanovich and his wife, Polly Platt, took me for what was evidently a ritual dinner at Chasen's. Everyone seemed to feel that the occasion was obligatory, though certainly it did nothing to familiarize us with one an-

other, if that was its purpose. Peter and Polly, I believe, concluded at once that I was a strange and troublesome creature, but held their peace for awhile.

Familiarity with the Bogdanoviches came soon enough, as it happened, for the very next day we settled into a running three-way argument, which was to last for several months, over the merits of *The Last Picture Show*. Probably the crux of the matter was that up to that time they had had little experience of Texans, and I little experience of non-Texans. They had little inkling of how stubborn Texans can be, and I had not yet learned that those non-Texans who involve themselves with moviemaking have, at best, only a formal interest in what one might call real life—their profound interest was in moviemaking. It was immediately clear to them that I knew nothing about writing screenplays, and just as immediately clear to me that they knew nothing about Texas. Knowing nothing of it, they found Texas—or, at least, the Texas I had imagined in that one book—exotic and exciting; while I, having lived in the state thirty-odd years, had begun to find it boring. Not only was I dissatisfied with the state as it was; I had also begun to be dissatisfied with the ways in which I imagined it, and at this time I nursed a particular animus against *The Last Picture Show*. It was the flattest and most hastily written of my books—dashed off, in fact, in a fit of pique at my hometown—and by the time it was published I had ceased to think well of it.



Illustrations by Ken Rinciari

Thus, when Peter and I started script conferences, he was faced with the reverse of the situation he might have expected. Instead of an author who was tensed to protect his story at every point, he was forced to deal with one who was hostile to large parts of the story and simply indifferent to the rest. Indeed, I myself didn't recognize how massive my indifference to the book was until I was attempting to write the first draft of the script.

It now seems to me that such indifference is more likely to be typical than not, when authors are called back to books with which they have been finished for years. There may actually be authors who continue to love their old books while writing their new books, but if so, it is probably the sort of love that thrives on distance. What they may actually love is the memory of how good they felt about the book while they were writing it. The warmth the text of the book itself generates is seldom much stronger than that which could be induced by a good cup of hot chocolate. They might enjoy picking up a given book for ten minutes, once every year or two, to glance at certain favored passages, but such little pleasures are not to be confused with the kind of immersion in the world of a book which is necessary if one is going to script it through four or five drafts.

Early on, I developed what might be called the deadline syndrome where film work was concerned. That is, I did nothing in advance of when it was due. On the few occasions when I did do something in advance, the producer invariably dropped the project before I could even deliver my pages, for one or another of the hundreds of reasons producers can find for dropping projects. I was never late, but neither was I early, and I soon fell into the habit of reading the book I was possibly going to script while jetting westward to talk about the deal. Ordinarily this method works fine, but with *The Last Picture Show* it didn't work at all. The pages seemed more of a desert

than the actual desert I was flying over. I found the parts that were about the two adolescent boys totally unreadable, and I was consequently a little appalled to find that the Bogdanoviches had taken the book to their hearts. They, I am sure, were equally appalled to discover that I had cast it out of mine, and I don't know that matters would have gone much farther had not Peter wanted to make the picture so badly.

What I didn't recognize at the time was that *The Last Picture Show* was exactly the kind of novel from which good movies are made—this is, a flatly written book with strong characterizations and a sense of period and place. Films like *The Blue Angel*, *Jules and Jim*, and *Treasure of Sierra Madre* were made from just such books—books that offer a director no stylistic resistance whatever. Towering classics always have a style, and adapting them is like attempting to translate poetry, only more difficult. Poetry is at least being taken from language to language, whereas a film adaptation attempts to take something from language to image. The director, like the translator, may take a free approach, or he may try to be literal, but if he hopes to find a cinematic counterpart to a literary style he can only count on being frustrated. True equivalents simply don't exist, and the book that best lends itself to filming, in my view, is the book from which one can abstract a place, a period, and a story for which the director can feel free to develop a style of his own.

In the years since my first book was filmed, I have repeatedly had people ask me, not how I like the movie, but how I felt about what "they did to" the book. The question is usually asked with a sympathetic smile, and the phrase "did to" always occurs. A book, in the public mind, is delicate, sensitive, feminine; Hollywood, in the same mind, is invariably cast as a despoiler—brutal, valueless, and far too crude to deal adequately with literature's supposedly tender form. The public at large evidently doesn't want to think too well of Hollywood, at least not where adaptations are concerned. Otherwise they wouldn't say "did to" as if they expect to hear that either a rape or an axe murder has taken place.

When *Hud* was released, I used to shock people a good deal by saying that I thought the movie was better than the book. No author is supposed to like a movie of his book better than he likes the book itself. Though in Hollywood, if he can somehow manage to like both equally, he will be considered a nice, young person.

In fact, when *Hud* came out, I was busy with other things and didn't give either the book or the film two minutes

thought. What I might have said was that the movie developed certain possibilities which hadn't occurred to me to develop in the book, but that tactic would not have gone to the heart of the matter either. The problem lies with the questioners, who don't really know what they want to know when they ask an author how he liked what the moviemakers "did to" his book.

What they want to know, I believe, is why they so often feel disappointed when they go to see a movie version of a book they have enjoyed or loved. Somehow, the movie never seems as much, and in their disappointment they don't realize



that they have gone to the movie filled with naive hope. What they hope for is a duplication, perhaps in vivid color, of a literary experience—that is, they hope to feel again all that they felt while reading the book. If the movie doesn't allow them as abundant possibilities for feeling as the book has—and movies made from books seldom do—then they emerge disappointed. Over the years, this disappointment has collected in a large lump in the public bosom, prejudicing them against the whole notion of adaptation. They have become convinced that movies made from books can't be as good as the books themselves, when in fact what they can't be are the books themselves. The tastiest apple in the world can't beat an orange at being an orange. The only way a director could really duplicate their reading experience for them would be to photograph the pages of the favored book and play them in slow motion. Indeed, I'm surprised Warhol hasn't thought of that.

Happily for directors, this problem of

naive anticipation only arises with two kinds of books: classics and bestsellers. When we sat down to adapt *The Last Picture Show*, a full four years after its publication, it had enjoyed a total sale in hardback of about fifteen hundred copies. For three of the four years (I'm convinced) the only people who read it were agents, producers, and other hustlers, all in Hollywood. There was no likelihood that the movie would interfere with the reading experience of very many of its viewers; the fact that both the book and the director were virtually unknown at the time allowed the movie to catch its millions of viewers almost completely by surprise—a happy circumstance with any art form. Most moviegoers hadn't expected to blunder so immediately back into the small towns they had lived in or into the adolescence they had finally sluffed off. In many cases, the shock alone was enough to keep them riveted to their seats.

Before I had completed one draft of *The Last Picture Show* I was convinced that no writer should adapt his own book, if only because it is unlikely that he can raise a genuine interest in that which he has already genuinely finished. To write a book thoroughly is, in effect, to exhaust one's capacity to participate in its emotions. Doing a screenplay requires one to participate in those emotions several more times, through successive drafts. When we started the screenplay I was so dead to the book that I wouldn't have objected to having all the characters machine-gunned in the first scene.

Peter, however, was just coming alive to *The Last Picture Show*. In the beginning, I think, it was really the period—that is, the fifties—that fascinated him, but as we worked the book and as the period began to open into another one, in ways which excited him, he became more and more enthusiastic about the book. Watching this enthusiasm mount, for a book I could hardly stand to read, was a little like watching the approach of madness, but at that stage I conceived my role to be that of a little moon, and I dutifully reflected whatever sunbursts of insight he might throw off.

Later, sometime during the writing of the second draft, I changed my mind about everything and decided that my very lack of interest in the book lent my contribution to the writing a unique value. Being indifferent, I was also objective. I had, of necessity, read and reread the text, and I knew exactly which scenes and tones were accurate, and which were false. Peter, at this time, had a tendency to believe every word I had written, and in his happiness he was like a child with a new jar of bubble solution. For a time, ideas flew out like bubbles. Most of these we burst in the air, but some made it to the

Continued on page 69



The Adams Family: Clockwise, from top left corner: George Grizzard as John Adams, Lisa Lucas as Nabby, J. C. Powell as Charles, Stephen Austin as John Quincy, Kathryn Walker as Abigail Adams, and Asher Pergament as Tommy.

PUBLIC TELEVISION'S BIG SPLASH

The Adams Family Saga Is an Expensive but Worthy Bicentennial Gift to the Nation

Bruce Cook

Although nobody around Channel 13 in New York has been imprudent enough to suggest it, "The Adams Chronicles," WNET's Bicentennial gift to the nation, represents a kind of coming-of-age for educational television in America. For no matter how well justified, to make such a boast would be to acknowledge that until now the most sumptuous fare offered on the Public Broadcasting Service has been "The Forsyte Saga," "Upstairs, Downstairs," and other choice morsels fallen from the high table of the British Broadcasting Corporation.

"The Adams Chronicles" is as choice a morsel as any of those. Five years in preparation, budgeted at \$5.2 million, and featuring a cast which numbers in the hundreds, it is the most ambitious project undertaken on educational television in America. It is certainly the costliest. "The Adams Chronicles" went more than a million dollars over budget, and this cost overrun has forced the program directors at New York's WNET to cut back on three local, public interest programs: "Between the Lines," "Round Table," and "The 51st State."

The thirteen one-hour dramatic programs (they begin broadcasting on PBS the twentieth of January) trace the lives and fortunes of John Adams and his descendants from 1750 to 1900. It is at once a family saga and also a kind of insider's view of this nation's history through this period of 150 years. For, as no less than John F. Kennedy observed of them, "The story of the Adams family runs like a scarlet thread of moral courage and strength through the whole fabric of American history."

Moral courage is just the point. It gives the series a sometimes painful relevance to the present which Virginia Kassel, its creator, affirms is intended. "Quite frankly the reason for doing the series has

grown during the five years we worked on it. It started out as a way of covering certain important moments in American history. But what has changed in this country since 1969, when we first began thinking about it, is the whole question of leadership. Maybe the series offers some answers to that, too." Maybe it does. After all, in the course of the Watergate hearings no other figure in American history was quoted as often as John Adams, hard-bitten moralist that he was.

"The Adams Chronicles" is, in many ways, a perfect TV vehicle for the Bicentennial. In telling the story of the Adams family, it touches upon many of the great moments of American history and deals with careers in public life that included a delegate to the Continental Congress, two Presidents, a Vice-President, a Secretary of State, ambassadors, and members of Congress. To mention, as they say, just a few.

From first to last, there has been great emphasis on historical accuracy in the preparation of the series. With 300,000 pages of diaries, letters, and miscellaneous documents in the Massachusetts Historical Society Adams Collection, and a small army of scholars to interpret them, there was little chance given writers to make serious errors or to play fast and loose with the facts.

Virginia Kassel herself was once a foot soldier in this army. She was first drawn to the subject years ago as associate editor of the *William and Mary Quarterly*. It was where she came in contact with L. H. Butterfield, who eventually, in 1954, became the editor of the Adams papers. When, after a whole career in public television had intervened, she found herself in a position to make recommendations on plans for the Bicentennial year, she thought of the Adams family and their dual role as actors and observers of American history. "They were just about ideal for our purpose," she says. "Through them we were able to span the history of this nation from the specific point of view of the family to the more diffuse story of the nation." She enlisted Butterfield in the enterprise and secured financing through the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation,

Fledgling lawyer, John Adams (George Grizzard) seeks the patronage of Justice Jeremiah Gridley (John Houseman).

John Adams's attendance at a banquet in Versailles was taped for "The Adams Chronicles" at historic Marble House in Newport, R.I.

I was told: "We do not have any evidence that John and Abigail slept in the same room."

and the Atlantic Richfield Company.

The involvement of the historians in the project both helped and hindered "The Adams Chronicles" playwrights, themselves rather a distinguished lot. Tad Mosel, for one, wrote two plays on John Quincy Adams, which covered the latter's unsuccessful presidency and subsequent highly successful career in the House of Representatives. The Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright (*All the Way Home*) says he greatly appreciated having the spade work done for him by the scholars. "They provided good general references, and whenever I needed anything—anything—very specific, it was usually there in less than an hour by messenger.

"But of course there were problems—with dialogue, for instance. In the House of Representatives, they called old Johnny Q. 'old man eloquent,' and that was because he tended to be rather florid and verbose on the floor—even in private conversations, if we're to believe the diaries and letters. So, in writing lines for William Daniels, who played John Q. in my two plays, the problem was one of simplifying, making dramatic language out of historical language. Sometimes a challenge.

"What kind of man was he? Well, a tough and rather unbending sort—not one who would be popular today, any more than he was in his own time. But I came not just to respect but to like him, and finally to identify with him. I knew I'd found a friend in Adams when I began hating his enemy, Jackson—that's Andrew Jackson, the great 'man

of the people,' with his nineteen slaves."

Most who were involved in interpreting the men of the Adams family in the "Chronicles" seem to agree that they would be a bit too flinty of disposition to be successful in politics today (which may account for the fact that their modern-day descendants have left public life altogether for business). Comments on them range from George Grizzard's off-the-cuff estimate to another writer that his alter ego, John Adams, "was a wonderful man and a pain in the ass" to screenwriter Millard Lampell's view that "very few of these people could operate in modern government." But that, adds Lampell, is not necessarily to their discredit. "The philosophical and intellectual depth of these men is what is impressive. Adams and Jefferson make modern politicians sound so glib and so phony."

Millard Lampell—he won an Emmy a few years back for the Hallmark Hall of Fame's "Eagle in a Cage"—felt a bit cramped by the attention lavished by the historians upon his own script, a play dealing with John Adams's years as America's first minister to England. "Some of the memos from the historians were priceless. I had Colonel Smith just touch Nabby Adams—they later married—to suggest a certain growing intimacy in their friendship, and I get this prim note that says, 'There is no evidence that Colonel Smith made physical advances to Nabby at this time. Can we not confine our lives to the documents?' And then when I gave John and Abigail a tender reunion after years of



George Grizzard, considerably matured, as John Adams during a session of the Continental Congress.

separation, I was told we do not have any evidence that they slept in the same room in the hotel.

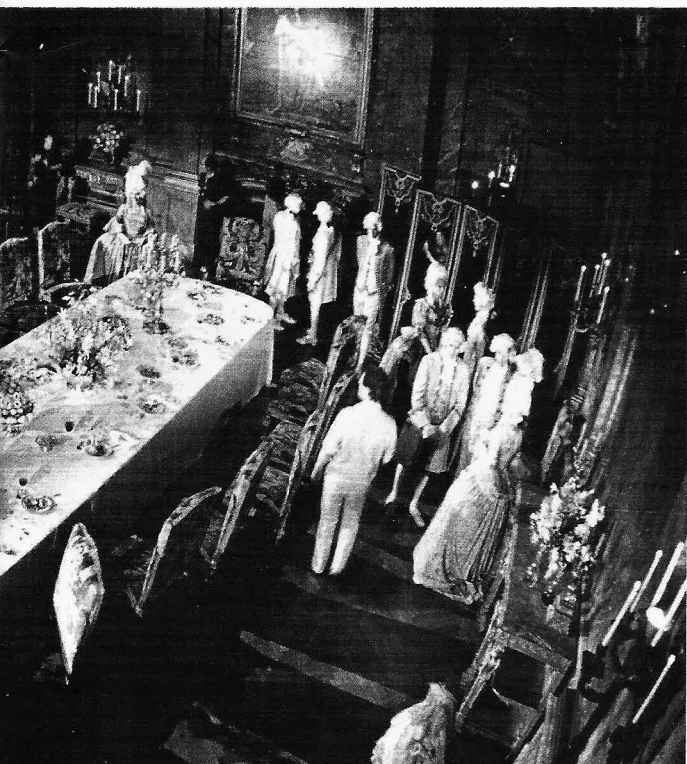
"Quite frankly, it was a running battle all the way with the historians. My own opinion has been that the historians have been the death of history. They bring you into a wax museum and they say, 'Here are your characters.' Well, my method of resisting that approach was to look for the moments *between* the documents. People don't write *life* in diaries and letters—they write events. Well, life was what I looked for. What I did was to block out the key moments—the *historical* moments—and then try to supply those before and after. I knew, for instance, there was a very big moment when John Adams would meet King George, the king against whom he had rebelled. Well, fine. That's all taken care of, well-documented, and so on. So I gave a lot of my attention to another scene. You're being presented at court, so what do you need? New court clothes. The wigmaker and the tailor descend upon John as he talks about the importance of what's coming up. Now I've had suits made, and I know the shock of that moment, when it's all basted up and the fit is right, and they rip it apart while it's on you. I used that to end it. That's visual. That's a scene."

And it works. Having seen Lampell's episode—the fourth in the series—I can attest to the quality of craftsmanship which went into this brief scene. I saw how well it prepared for, by means of contrast, that graver moment which followed with King

George. Lampell's method of writing the "moments between" seems, in fact, to have been the one underlying the production of the entire series. The playwrights, directors, and actors have achieved a remarkable degree of intimacy for costume drama on television. There is little—practically none—of the tableau style which can make historical drama so deadly dull. For the most part, they have concentrated admirably and convincingly on the relationships, public and private, which made up the lives of the Adams family. Even in lavish ball scenes—there are a couple in the series—and against sets which suggest the grandeur of eighteenth-century Europe, the tone is personal, the style is understated.

Three of "The Adams Chronicles" thirteen episodes are set, in whole or in large part, in Europe. Specifically to direct these, but in general because his work is much admired here, James Cellan-Jones was brought from England. He has directed some of Britain's finest TV productions and has done one theatrical feature, *The Nelson Affair*, with Glenda Jackson and Peter Finch (much better than its reviews and brief run here might indicate). "I've known his work ever since 'The Forsyte Saga,'" says Virginia Kassel, who was herself responsible for bringing that series to American television. "I've been so aware of what Jim did with tape, using it as film. I followed his career carefully after that, knowing his potential for this series I was planning. Whenever I was in London,

"In the course of the Watergate hearings no figure in American history was quoted as often as John Adams."



John Quincy Adams, son of John, with wife Louise Catherine. (Pamela Payton Wright and William Daniels are the actors.)

Peter Brandon as Henry Adams in the course of his education. Gilmer McCormick plays his wife, Marian Hooper Adams.

I'd see him and keep him posted, because I knew he would be especially good for the European episodes. He has great vitality with historical situations. There's great vitality in his work all the way around."

It was Cellan-Jones who directed two of the episodes—the third and fourth—which I was shown by WNET in advance of their airing. And I must say, they were all that Kassel promised. In particular, I was struck by the filmic quality of the episodes. His direction on tape for "The Adams Chronicles" is even more fluid and open than what I remember of "The Forsyte Saga." If you have seen some of "Jennie," his Thames Television mini-series, starring Lee Remick as Winston Churchill's mother, recently shown on PBS, then you have a better sense of what Cellan-Jones is now doing with tape. His work should be enough to give pause to American TV producers and directors, most of whom are so tightly locked into Hollywood and film.

Cellan-Jones was in New York, finishing post-production on his last episode—the eleventh, dealing with Charles Francis Adams, who was minister to Great Britain during the Civil War—when he took time to talk about his experiences over lunch. I remarked on the film-like look of his episodes—in particular on the free use of outdoor locations. "Well, that's typical of the entire series, of course," replied Cellan-Jones. "But I think it's good to get out on location, don't you? In 'Jennie' I

began to do that quite a lot. We shot at Blenheim Palace and other places. All very much to the good, I think."

Doesn't tape outside a studio present real problems?

"Nothing that can't be handled. On location I try to shoot tape just as I do film. The equipment is flexible enough to manage this today. I've used tape everywhere on location—everywhere except in an airplane because there's got to be someplace for that wire to plug in.

"And, of course, *in* the studio tape has some very real advantages over film. There is no difficulty matching shots at all—no wait for that—because you have the instant playback which tape gives you. And on a long emotional scene in which actors want to build a feeling, you can use shots of long duration which wouldn't really be practical or perhaps even possible with film. I used five- to ten-minute takes quite a lot. And in one scene—a ball scene of some complexity—I did a twenty-minute take using three or four cameras. Of course, there were many pickups in retakes to be done, but it gave an extraordinarily whole quality to it which I think was worth the trouble."

"What about the difference in working here after having worked in England?" I asked him. "It's been chiefly at BBC, hasn't it?"

"Yes," he said, "chiefly BBC. There is one difference, and only one that is worth mentioning. In production here I was given more time to shoot,

"Their modern day descendants have left public life altogether for business."



Another generation: Charles Francis Adams, lawyer, diplomat, author, with his wife, Abigail. (John Beal, Nancy Coleman.)

John Quincy Adams arguing his anti-slavery case before the Supreme Court. The setting is the original, restored chamber.

but less time to rehearse than I was used to. I think greater emphasis on rehearsal time with actors pays off tremendously in the style and quality of a production. This, I think, is where British television has the edge *at the moment*—and I emphasize that last as probably temporary.

“But as for working in New York, it’s been marvelous. I’ve always wanted to work here. When I was a kid the most exciting place I could think of in the world was always New York. I’d much rather work here than in Los Angeles. I’ve been there and didn’t like it much. Right here it’s enormously exciting—indigestible, but exciting.”

Cellan-Jones thought the television situation in New York humming along quite hopefully. With “The Adams Chronicles” being shot through the summer of 1975 and “Beacon Hill” (until it was canceled) being taped around the corner at CBS Television Center, there seemed a kind of mini-renaissance under way in the city where American television got started. “One thing, though,” says Cellan-Jones, “to get the thing going properly you will have to stop importing all this British stuff and start doing your own. Really, I’ve seen the projected list of British imports of one oil company, which shall remain nameless, and there is such a load of crap in with the jewels!”

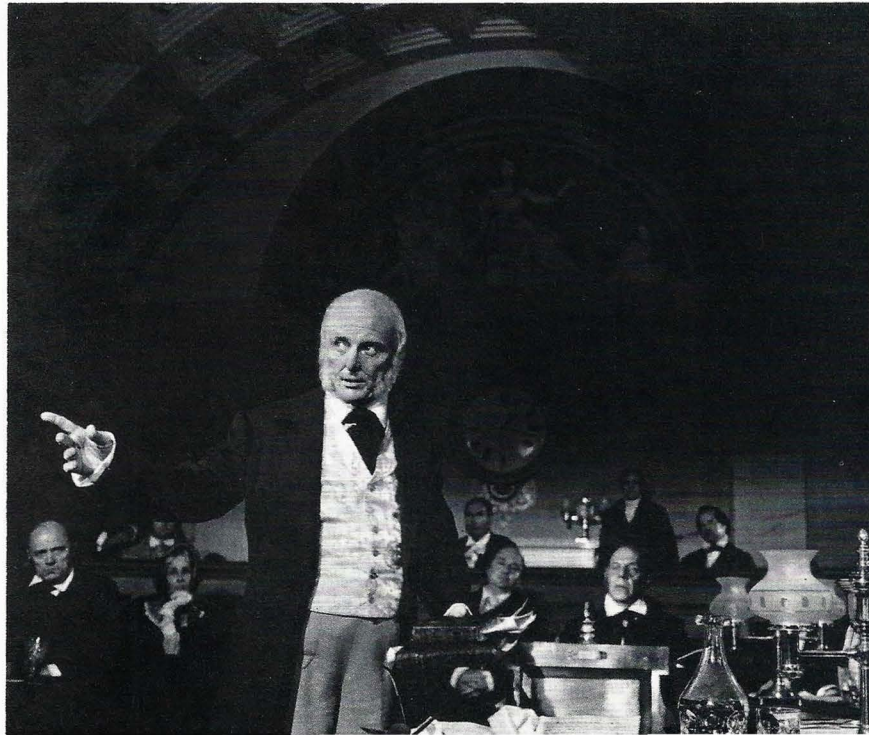
Is it premature to talk of a television renaissance in New York? Do two swallows make a spring? Well, there may be something under way at that, for both “The Adams Chronicles” and “Beacon

Hill” are distinguished for their creative use of videotape. As long as television was thought of as nothing more than an electronic means of distributing film, it was probably true that New York could not compete against Hollywood. Videotape is quite another matter, though. The inherent advantages and increased flexibility of shooting on tape may make the New York renaissance a reality.

I talked about this with Bob Spitzer, production manager for “The Adams Chronicles,” after getting a guided tour of the studio facility where, except for location work (in such places as Providence and Newport, Rhode Island; Philadelphia; and Washington, D.C.), the series was shot. The building is located in midtown Manhattan on the far west side. Until 1963 it was the home of Fox Movietone News, and Movietone’s vast newsreel library is still stored there. Its huge sound stages (accommodating five or six sets each) have been used to shoot a number of movies since then—*The Group*, *Where’s Poppa?*, and *The Exorcist*.

Bob Spitzer has fifteen years experience in New York television, the last ten of them with Ed Sullivan Productions. Toward the end of that period he was running the Sullivan cable TV operation. It was Spitzer who outfitted the facility for television. “What we’ve done here makes it completely viable, maybe even ideal, for tape production.” As he explained it, it did seem ideal. The sound stages are the biggest in the city. In addition to the production offices and dressing rooms one might expect to

The inherent advantages of shooting on tape make the New York renaissance a reality.



Cast and crew watch an instant replay during filming of a Continental Congress sequence on location in Philadelphia.

find, the studio has a large rehearsal hall on the top floor and a carpenter shop in the basement. "That last is important," says Spitzer, "because it eliminates the necessity for a lot of teamster hauling of sets, props, and furniture from other locations. Always a big expense.

"Now I had the idea to continue this building as a videotape facility. I approached Camera Mart, Inc., the rental agent for the building, and asked them why they didn't take over the video setup we had installed. This included the grid work for lighting the sound stages, which is excellent. You see TV lights from the top and film from the floor up. In addition to the grid work, it included the power distribution setup, the video equipment, and control board. Well, they bought it. Camera Mart is retaining the tape capability here. The facility can be used either for film or videotape with no special outfitting necessary. I really think this is the most ideal setup in New York City. If I had the money, I'd buy the building myself. So, without a doubt, this indicates some sort of renaissance is here. Camera Mart was betting on the future of New York as a videotape center when they bought all this. They're good businessmen. It's a smart bet."

What is left unstated in Bob Spitzer's analysis is the advantage of the enormous talent pool offered by New York. There are probably still more writers, directors, and actors per hundred thousand in Manhattan than anywhere else in the world—this in spite of the steady drain to Hollywood during the

past decade and a half. For New York actors especially, "The Adams Chronicles," with its large cast and big budget, has been a blessing. It has given roles to some of the very best, too. As the veteran character actor, John Beal, remarked to me, "I don't know if you looked at the cast, but it's just like a who's who of the theater. They may come in and work a day or a whole episode, but I kept running into people I'd known and worked with on the West Coast and here in New York. Some of the best."

John Beal himself is a good example. He has been on the New York stage since 1930, and made his first movie in 1935 (*The Little Minister*, in which he played the title role). Among other familiar names and faces involved in "The Adams Chronicles" are Leora Dana, Taina Elg, John Houseman, Katharine Houghton, and William Daniels. Doubling over from "Beacon Hill" are Nancy Marchand and Kathryn Walker.

But the best known and hardest working of them all is George Grizzard. Playing John Adams, he is in nine of the thirteen episodes. We see him change in the process from a very young man to a very old one (ninety-one in his death scene). Shot, as it was, over a single summer, the series gave Grizzard the sort of challenge which seldom comes to an actor. And he met it. As Virginia Kassel said of him, "Without George's devotion and hard work, it would have been a far different series. He immersed himself totally. At one point he actually

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Trouble at WNET

Well before the first of the series was to have its airing, the budget overrun of "The Adams Chronicles" caused a crisis at WNET. Jay Iselin, president of the station, was apparently unaware of large expenses being incurred because of the rush to meet the air-time deadline. With no provision for deficits, a cutback in local programs occurred. Much of the overrun went into overtime pay for union personnel, and some of the delay was caused by a seven-week strike against the station by the Writers Guild of America, East. Thus, by doing a series so opulent, public television encountered situations not uncommon for the commercial networks. These factors will be explored in a future issue of *American Film*.



*British director James Cellan-Jones:
"Stop importing all this British stuff
and start doing your own."*

*Former Fox Movietone News Studio
in Manhattan served as the facility
where much of "The Adams Chroni-
cles" was videotaped.*

began speaking of Adams as himself. 'Then I did this,' he would say, and 'When I was President....'

And it's true enough. Grizzard does throw himself into the role with singular abandon. In a way, he could only deal with it by *becoming* John Adams, living in his skin for the five months or so it took to shoot the series. During one period, for instance, he was called upon to rehearse episodes three and four while he was shooting the eighth; once finished with them, he rehearsed five and six as he shot the ninth. "It was great fun," says Grizzard. "For a while there I was adding another ten years every week—and trying to keep in character, of course. In my research I turned up the fact that he developed palsy at sixty. Well, I managed to work that in. By the time Adams was an old man and was going to die, there was no doing little bits with palsy and so on. I had to *age*. And to handle that convincingly I had to spend five hours and ten minutes in the makeup chair before I even put my foot on the set."

What was it like? What are the demands of such a role on an actor?

"Well, I've done four motion pictures and a lot of television, but I had never done anything like this before. In the first six episodes I am in eighty percent of the scenes—eighty percent! I've never done a motion picture where I had to carry the film, where it all depended on me. That's really the only thing I can think of that would be comparable to

what I was called upon to do in "The Adams Chronicles."

"Don't get the idea that I'm complaining, though. No actor would—or should. I learned so much from the series. It was so much more of a part than so many of those I've been called upon to do in the past. And ultimately it worked, I think, because I felt comfortable in Adams's skin. He was a funny sort of a man for us to consider today. He certainly wasn't Rock Hudson riding in on a white horse. He was really a crafty sort, but he had integrity, and he was honest. The kind of man I have to admire myself."

George Grizzard may, through his performance, persuade the whole world to admire John Adams. For with "The Adams Chronicles," WNET hopes to reverse the process and sell its product to the rest of the world. It would be nice, wouldn't it, if there developed a mania for it abroad as it did here for "The Forsyte Saga"? Well, why not? It is, after all, of comparable quality, and as James Cellan-Jones said, "They can't have not heard of 1776 in England, can they?" But he adds, "The only difficulty is that there may be a little confusion about which family we are chronicling here. When I mentioned the name of the series, it was widely supposed that I was going to America to do a few horror shows—'The Addams Family,' you know." ■

Bruce Cook writes on the arts for *Newsweek*.

"Adams was really a crafty sort, but he had integrity, and he was honest. The kind of man I have to admire myself."



A Dickens Garland

**From Griffith on,
the eminent Victorian
has captivated film directors
and the public.**

Michael Pointer

"Dickens was a terrible writer," declared Jackie Cooper when announcing a film version of *A Christmas Carol*. "In the original, Scrooge is mean and stingy, but you never know why. We're giving him a mother and father, an unhappy childhood, a whole background which will motivate him."

Well, that "terrible writer" happens to be the author most adapted for the screen (whatever became of the version Jackie Cooper was talking about?), although this claim requires some qualification and explanation. There have certainly been more Sherlock Holmes films, for example, but by no means all based on Conan Doyle; probably more films with other famous fictional characters, with the same reservation. But there have been no "series" of films and sequels built on particular Dickens characters; no *Son of Oliver Twist*, no *Cricket on the Hearth Rides Again*, not even *Abbott and Costello Meet Edwin Drood*.

Dickens, more than most writers of his own time and earlier, has the reputation of remaining fresh and modern in his writing, but it is due less to his written style than to the astonishing characterization in his books that he has proved so attractive to stage and screen. A nucleus of Dickens's characters is among the best known in the world's fiction: Oliver Twist, Mr. Pickwick, Micawber, Scrooge (a name now virtually part of the English language), and now we hold visual images of the best-remembered performances in these roles, and tend to think of W. C. Field's Micawber, Ronald Colman's Sydney Carton, Alec Guinness's Fagin, Finlay Currie's Magwitch, Martita Hunt's Miss Havisham, and so on. We all have our own little galleries.

The name of Charles Dickens seems to carry two distinct connotations in the minds of most people. There is Dickens, the so-called inventor of Christmas, all holly and punchbowls, and there is the



David Lean's Oliver Twist was withheld here for three years because the Guinness Fagin was deemed anti-Semitic. Here shown are John Howard Davies as Oliver, Robert Newton as Bill Sikes.



Oliver!, directed by Carol Reed, won the Academy's 1968 Oscar for the best picture. The musical featured Ron Moody as Fagin, (and left) Jack Wild as the Artful Dodger, Mark Lester as Oliver Twist.

Moody's Fagin was more of a picaresque old rogue than a grasping villain, and, contrary to the story's spirit, almost managed to be lovable.



word "Dickensian," which has become a synonym for all the conditions of squalor and deprivation in mid-Victorian England which Dickens campaigned so hard to rectify. Both aspects have been featured in the cinema, the former much more than the latter.

The darker side of Dickens's works has often troubled those who have looked to him for entertainment, for reassurance, for moral improvement. But Dickens was a man with a message, with several messages in fact, and much of his writing life was spent in seeking to get his messages over to his reading public. To a certain extent, this was made easier for him by the early popularity of his lighter essays, and particularly *Pickwick Papers*, which brought him the fame and success necessary for his later, harder works to succeed.

In those darker works of Charles Dickens the elements of humor are scarcer. He knew that comic relief in a book like *Hard Times* should be used sparingly, merely to relieve the unremitting burden of the harsh tale. In such stories, hard hearts are usually eventually softened, and a strong moral

lesson is learned by the perpetrators of the various injustices and indignities, but not before there have been long, harrowing and heartrending periods of life for characters who, amazingly, survive to enjoy an easier existence. However, not every character makes it.

It's not surprising that the bleaker stories of Dickens have seldom been adapted for the screen; fewer, in fact, than have been placed on the stage. But in Victorian times drama was generally required to point to a strong moral, and the close depiction of physical and spiritual degradation was not shunned. Times were changing, however, when the motion picture began to emerge and challenged the live stage as the principal source of entertainment. Movies provided cheap escapism from such bad conditions and situations and, consequently, prolonged scenes of poverty and distress were just not desirable on the screen.

Dickens was probably the first author to have his work used by the novelty diversion of the cinematograph. In England, at the incredibly early date of 1898, movie pioneer R.W. Paul made *Mr. Bumble*



Scrooge has always provided a field day for actors. Sir Seymour Hicks portrayed him in a 1935 British version of A Christmas Carol.



Impish Alastair Sim played the title role in a 1951 adaptation of Scrooge. Critics thought it too full of gloom and ghosts.



Scrooge once more (1970) in the person of Albert Finney, this time a musical version full of Christmas jollity and plum pudding.

the *Beadle*, and pointed the way the cinema would adopt the great characters from Dickens through more than a hundred films. The next two tiny fragments were also by Paul: *Scrooge; or Marley's Ghost* and *Mr. Pickwick's Christmas at Wardle's*, both in 1901. And from then until 1938 there was never more than three years without a new Dickens film appearing somewhere in the world.

Apart from the financial rewards from displaying well-loved titles, what the early silent filmmakers gained from their adaptations was prestige. The tremendous reputations already held by the great works of literature gave the moving pictures some semblance of respectability. In an era when fair-ground bioscope shows defensively claimed to be "moral, refined, and pleasing to ladies," an element of culture was a great help.

Outstanding among the scores of early Dickens silents were two small groups, one American and one British. In America, Edwin Thanhouser did very good business with films of famous books, highlighted in 1911 by his *David Copperfield* in three one-reel parts, followed by *The Old Curiosity Shop* in the same year, *Nicholas Nickleby* in 1912, and *Little Dorritt* in 1913. In Britain, Cecil Hepworth was doing much the same thing, starting in 1912 with *Oliver Twist* at the instigation of the remarkable Thomas Bentley, who had long been involved with stage dramatizations of Dickens. Bentley had presented himself to Hepworth as "a great Dickens impersonator and scholar," and although he was undoubtedly an experienced enthusiast, his claims to scholarship failed to impress the gentle and learned Hepworth. Hepworth recalled dryly in connection with their film *David Copperfield* (1913):

"I remember the joyful glee with which he recounted how he had managed to secure in the picture the fascia board upon the house saying that it

was 'the House immortalized by Dickens as the Home of Miss Betsy Trotwood.' I do not think he ever understood why I received this news with so little enthusiasm."

The numerous film adaptations suggest that Dickens's books are suitable for the screen, and belie the many problems which always arise. Those great, sprawling novels, overflowing with their vast armies of colorful characters, are immensely difficult to compress within the normal length of a film without drastic surgery, as many producers have discovered. One of the worst, and apparently unforgivable, failings of any adaptation is to omit a well-remembered incident or character, irrespective of their direct value to the main plot or story; but it is precisely because Dickens's writings are bursting with rambunctious humanity that they are so loved, and that so much is expected of any dramatization.

Equally intriguing is the matter of Dickens's indirect influence on the very development of the cinema, mainly through the work of D. W. Griffith. Certainly the similarities of technique are numerous: the use of heavy melodrama in realistic settings, exaggerated characterization, a strong social awareness, and above all the method of cutting back and forth between scenes—the parallel action without which the dynamic power in the movies would be lost.

No less a person than Sergei Eisenstein attached great importance to the effect of Dickens on Griffith, and wrote a lengthy treatise on "Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today." Long before that, in 1925, Griffith's wife, Linda Arvidson, cited Griffith himself as acknowledging the source of the "cutback" device.

"How can you tell a story jumping about like that? The people won't know what it's about."

"Well," said Mr. Griffith, "doesn't Dickens write that way?"

"Yes, but that's Dickens; that's novel writing; that's different."

Griffith made one film directly from his favorite author, *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1909), while his *True Heart Susie* (1919) is a variation on *David Copperfield*, and *Orphans of the Storm* (1921) owes quite a lot to *A Tale of Two Cities*. A final similarity between the two men was that occasionally Griffith's films were maligned for containing social criticism, just as Dickens's books had been in his own time.

It would be a mistake to dismiss all the silent adaptations as inadequate. Within the limitations already mentioned, and the lack of dialogue, a number of them were sincere and praiseworthy attempts to convey the essence of the stories. While toning down the uncomfortable sections may have upset the balance, the very need to excise so much in condensing for the screen was the cause.

Naturally, the advent of sound brought a rash of remakes of silent successes, but for most people the first landmark in Dickens was Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's *David Copperfield*, produced by David O. Selznick in 1935. Selznick had an uncanny gift for transferring great literature to the screen, and was responsible for a whole string of classic movies based on classic books. His best known, of course, was the monumental *Gone With the Wind*. Indeed, in three short years at MGM he was responsible for *Copperfield*, *Anna Karenina*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*, all of which still rank as exceptionally fine screen adaptations.

In one of his interminable memos, he pointed out two main reasons for his success:

"I am sure that the opposition to filming *David Copperfield* was based largely on the fact that both classics and costume pictures had been taboo in the industry for a long time. I had encountered the same sort of opposition when, shortly before, I had

decided to make *Little Women*. The executives and sales heads of RKO had suggested that I 'modernize' the story, but I can't say there was anyone at MGM who was silly enough to suggest this on *Copperfield*. I think it was simply that it very obviously couldn't be a star vehicle, that it was a very expensive picture to make and would violate all the rules of showmanship which were then considered sacred and inviolable.... It's true that other classics have been attempted with unhappy results. This was, I'm sure, due to two factors. Some of the classics produced have been selected from those that are no longer read or loved. The others were made very badly with attempts to make them conform to the scenario formulas of that time."

Both Selznick and the film's director, George Cukor, had a tremendous feeling for classics of literature, and shared the understanding and determination to preserve the spirit of the story, as Cukor himself related.

"It's a pity that in the book *David Copperfield* grows up to be such a bore, a typical young Victorian—people chided me about this when they saw the picture and said, 'The second half is not as good as the first.' 'Well,' I said, 'the second volume of the novel is not as good as the first.' By then I'd discovered my own rule in doing adaptations ... you must get the essence of the original, which may involve accepting some of the weaknesses. When you read *David Copperfield*, you know why it's lasted. There's too much melodrama, and the second half is unsatisfactory, but there's this underlying vitality and invention. For me, that determined the style of the picture. In the same way, there was the problem of re-creating Dickens's characters, making them slightly grotesque, at times caricature, yet human—as Dickens did himself."

Copperfield was followed in the same year by *A Tale of Two Cities*, with Ronald Colman in one of



Above: Freddie Bartholomew, W.C. Fields in the Selznick/Cukor *David Copperfield* (1935).

Ronald Colman as Sydney Carton and William Woods as Charles Darnay, in *A Tale of Two Cities*.



One of the first American adaptations of Dickens was D. W. Griffith's *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1909).

Martita Hunt, as Miss Havisham, Anthony Wager as Pip, in David Lean's *Great Expectations* (1946).



his finest performances. Selznick stayed on at MGM after his contract ended so that he could complete the picture, which was just as well because the company was even less enthusiastic about it than *Copperfield*. Once again Selznick was vindicated by the film's great triumph, and subsequent remakes of both MGM movies have been unsuccessful because they failed to convey the feeling of the originals, and sought to improve the author's masterpieces.

One further Dickens film had been planned while David Selznick was at MGM, *A Christmas Carol*; but it was not until 1938, three years after he left, that the picture was made, and the result was a predictably uninspired and rather glossy product of the MGM machine. Despite the ensuing wartime boom in escapist costume pictures, there were no further Dickens films made between 1938 and 1946, the longest such period there has been.

The little wave of Dickens films, which appeared in Britain after the Second World War, came at a time of great social change in that country. At the same time, it was a period of a healthily revived British cinema, eagerly seeking subjects to continue the wartime triumphs of a new generation of filmmakers. And, in the austere economy of the immediate postwar era, stories in the public domain had an added attraction.

So when David Lean's *Great Expectations* burst upon the screen in 1946, closely followed in 1947 by Alberto Cavalcanti's *Nicholas Nickleby* and in 1948 by Lean's *Oliver Twist*, the Dickens revolution appeared to be on. In fact, what really happened was the emergence of David Lean as a director, with two undoubted masterpieces which are part of film history. In both instances Lean played a major part in the adaptations, which were so skillfully done as to convince many enthusiasts that virtually nothing from the books had been omitted, and both stories were depicted with the amazing visual skill which justly earned Lean his place among the world's finest film directors.

Who can ever forget the gripping opening of *Great Expectations*, when young Pip is suddenly confronted in the graveyard by the convict Magwitch? In the cinema, the encounter left us as terrified as Pip. Or the eloquent opening of *Oliver Twist*, when Oliver's mother makes her pain-racked way to the workhouse, bears her baby, and dies unwanted and unmourned.

"What we were trying to do in *Great Expectations*," said David Lean, "was to create in the film that larger-than-life picture which is really most characteristic of Dickens's kind of writing. The scenes of the boy Pip lying terrified in his bedroom after a night of fear, creeping downstairs at dawn, and then stealing the food for the convicts out on the moors was something Dickens wrote as if he were right inside the boy himself. We tried in the film to make the audience share Pip's fear. If we hadn't done this, we should have been faced with quite a different problem—making the audience accept what is really a pretty exaggerated piece of

melodrama. They might easily have found the convicts and their fustian dialogue just funny instead of terrifying, if we had not built up the fear in the audience at the same time as we did in the boy.”

Oliver Twist tackled openly the poverty, squalor, and crime depicted in the book, but even then the treatment was understandably subdued. David Lean shrewdly recognized that because such conditions do not exist now, the film could not carry the white heat of Dickens's rage over injustices, and still remain good entertainment. It was Lean's subtle handling of such changes of emphasis and adjustments of the story for dramatic balance that made them acceptable. Not acceptable in America, however, where Alec Guinness's grotesque Fagin was held to be anti-Semitic (presumably by people who had never read the book) and pressure was applied to suppress the film. This absurd bigotry succeeded in delaying the U.S. premiere for three years, when it appeared in cut form. It is rarely seen except on American television.

Although we knew we were looking at great films, it never occurred to us that we were also seeing the Dickens film at its zenith, for all that followed was anticlimactic. *Nicholas Nickleby*, which actually appeared between the two David Lean films, would have been better left unmade. The book is so unsuitable for a film it has hardly ever been attempted. *Scrooge* (1951) was a highly competent and enjoyable picture, although Alastair Sim's mischievous nature precludes him from being convincingly flinty-hearted. *The Pickwick Papers* (1952) was a happy romp in the Dickens Christmas style, but neither this nor *Scrooge* reached the heights of great films. Dickens went into the doldrums, and the cinema began retreating at high speed before the inexorable advance of television where, incidentally, the serial has proved to be the ideal form for such tales as *Nickleby*, given good writing, casting, and directing.

The upsurge of the stage musical caught on to Dickens with Lionel Bart's *Oliver!*, and its success led inevitably to a lavish film version in 1968, heaped with praise and loaded with awards. It was followed two years later by a musical version of *Scrooge*, directed by Lean's former collaborator, Ronald Neame. Both films were impressive productions and successful entertainments, but the jollification of Dickens, long the cinema's way of moderating the difficult parts of the stories, finally overwhelmed the subjects and practically everything was changed.

Particularly in *Oliver!*, the artificiality inherent in any musical was further emphasized by wrong casting and characterization. Soft-faced Mark Lester was clearly the opposite of the workhouse boy Oliver Twist. Apple-cheeked Jack Wild had obviously never roughed it for years, as the Artful Dodger had. Fat, jovial Harry Secombe was the antithesis of the oily Bumble, and Shani Wallis as Nancy looked more like the girl next door than an ill-used whore. And Ron Moody's Fagin! The despicable Fagin was turned into a picaresque, old



Ronald Colman as the wastrel who sacrificed himself for love of a good woman in *A Tale of Two Cities*.

rogue and allowed to escape to further villainy. Of course, it was a smash hit, but the makers should have kept quiet about its fidelity to Dickens.

So, from the peaks of the splendid and beautiful David Lean films, came the slide into the cozy oblivion of the musical, and the latest picture in this category is about to appear. Originally entitled *Quilp*, the makers, *Readers Digest*, have already renamed it *Mr. Quilp of the Old Curiosity Shop*, presumably for the same reason that filmmakers choose well-known book titles in the first place.

But there seems to be a serious difference with this subject which I am very curious to see cleared up. In *Oliver!*, virtue is eventually rewarded and evil-doing is punished. In *Scrooge*, old Ebenezer finally repents, and all ends well. What on earth are they going to do with Daniel Quilp, as nasty a character as Dickens ever devised? A lecherous, dwarf moneylender! Maybe it's just as well Abbott and Costello are dead. ■

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Television as Dream

Peter H. Wood

An Introduction to Psychoanalysis of the Medium

Not long ago the American diplomat and scholar, George F. Kennan, told a group of Oxford and Cambridge graduates that they lived in a world changing too fast for its own good. It is "a world," Kennan said severely, "given increasingly to the primitive delights of visual communication."

Ever since monks stopped illuminating their manuscripts and turned to the dull efficiencies of the printing press, academics and other bibliophiles have taken a condescending stance toward nonlinear forms of information exchange. Particularly offensive to shareholders in the print economy is television, that newest process of illumination which changes light into an electrical image and back to light again. There is something threatening, confusing, paralyzing about its "primitive delights." It is a bad dream, and they wish it would go away.

But Kennan and all the king's men could never devise an adequate "containment theory" for American television. The cornucopia-shaped tube is in ninety-eight percent of American dwellings, and for at least a quarter of every day it is scanning electrons toward us at a rate of over thirty thousand lines per second. It has become a real and permanent fixture in our homes and our heads. Television is no dream. Or is it?

If television is not the meaningless nightmare deplored by numerous elders, could it, in fact, be something of the inverse: a significant flow of collective dream materials which we have not yet begun to interpret adequately? Most of us can recall incidents where television contributed to our own dreams. (After all, television frequently serves to put us to sleep these days—both figuratively and literally.) And the recent Surgeon General's Report on TV violence even hinted at a simple substitution, reporting that those who watch more television dream less. But if we can

accept the idea that television affects the dream-life of individuals, can we entertain the thought that television may also constitute—in some unrecognized way—part of the collective dream-life of the society as a whole? Is there room, in other words, for the *interpretation of television as dream*?

If there are grounds for such an approach, as I myself am increasingly convinced, then it bears directly on the concept which we accept as "TV criticism." Where does TV criticism stand now? Almost all current criticism falls into one or both of the following modes: cultural commentary or industrial commentary.

The cultural approach, though by no means highbrow, involves a slight distancing from the material. It addresses matters drawn from traditional art forms, particularly from drama, such as the subtlety of the story line and the skill of the actors. Unfortunately, as Marvin Barrett of the Columbia University School of Journalism points out, most network shows measured on these scales "don't even register in the aesthetic area." The TV critic applying traditional dramatic and cultural standards confronts, in Barrett's phrase, "continuous mediocrity."

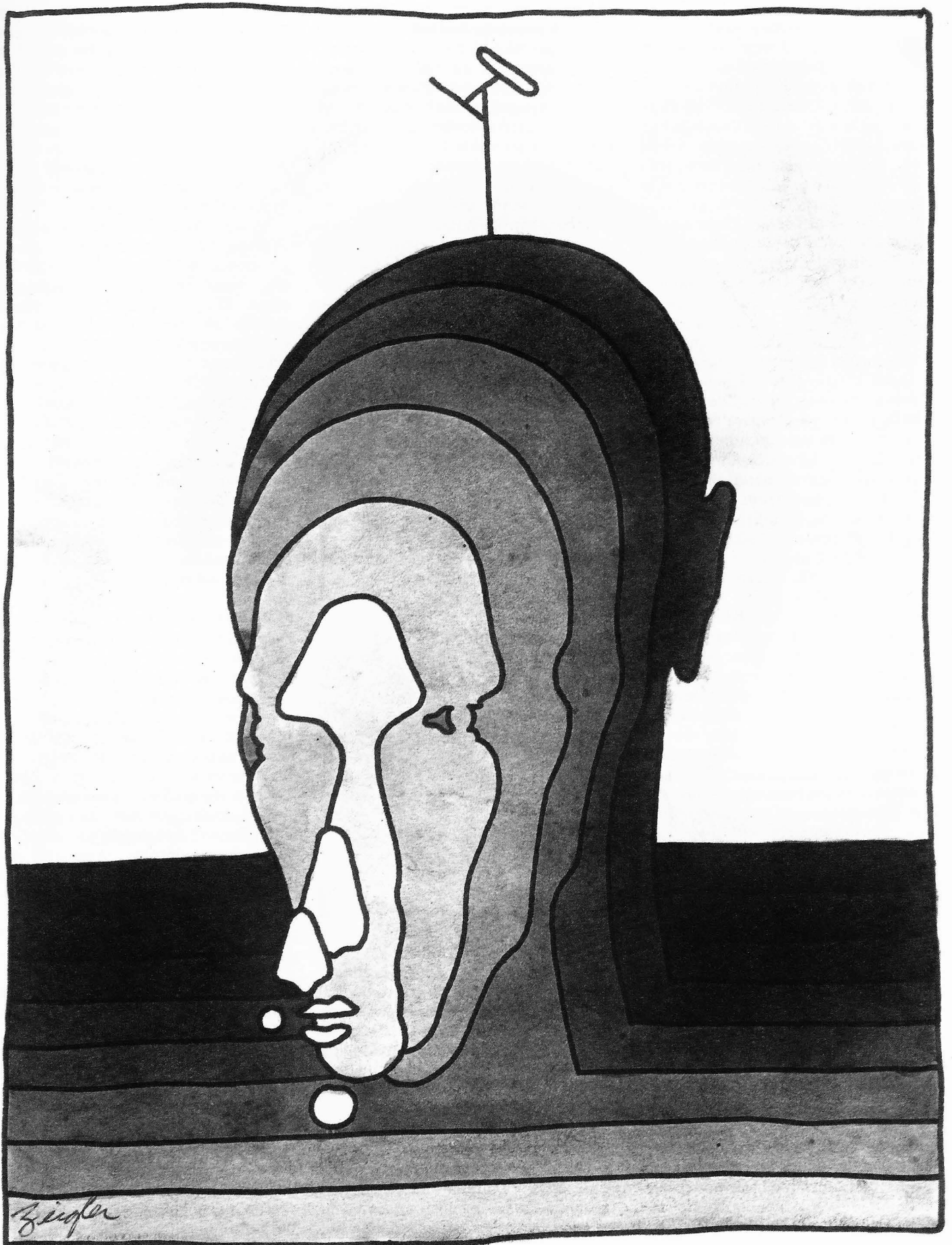
But if the Marvin Barretts dread and depreciate such mediocrity, the Rona Barretts extol and expand it. The mode of industrial criticism which has grown up around film, TV's celluloid godparent, shapes a vast range of TV commentary. It ranges from pure network handouts to hard-nosed exposés. But whether adulatory or critical, intimate or detached, this mode depends upon an appearance of investigative reporting and overflows with personal and production details. "Which people?" "What expenses?" "Why—when—how?" It is "lowdown" by and for the would-be insider. I am suggesting adding a third mode to the current

discussion of our most popular medium: dream analysis. First, however, basic similarities between television and dream must be established. We can begin by considering a list of half a dozen general congruities.

Both television and dreams have a highly visual quality; both are highly symbolic; both involve a high degree of fantasy and wish-fulfillment. Both television and dreams appear to contain much that is disjointed and trivial, but the the contents of dreams, and perhaps someday of television, can be shown to be consistent and coherent.

In addition, while both television and dreams have an enormous and powerful content, in each case most of it is readily and thoroughly forgotten. Freud wrote that, "Most dreams cannot be remembered at all and are forgotten except for some tiny fragments." It is relatively easy, and apparently necessary, for individual dreamers to avoid or forget much of the content of most of their dreams. They are able, at least with effort and practice, to awaken from dreams they cannot handle, but also to return to and recall dreams with which they are ready to deal. Avoiding conscious recollection of a dream does not erase its content; the themes continue to recur and impinge. All this is quite similar with television, where avoidance mechanisms (beyond direct forgetfulness) function at a variety of levels from living room channel switching to the Federal Communications Commission censorship. (It may not be surprising that Timothy Leary and others who began experimenting with non-sleep dreaming through drugs adopted a terminology drawn from television: "turn on," "tune in," "turn off.") Is it conceivable that television, like dreams, could be repetitive, boring and mundane on the surface, precisely because its latent content is so relevant,

Illustrations by Ted Zeigler



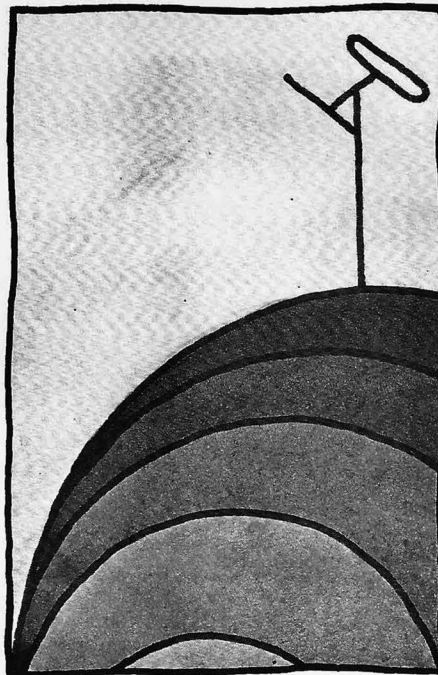
powerful, and pervasive?

Finally, both television and dreams make consistent use—overt and disguised—of materials drawn from recent experience. Freud stated in his *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (1924) that “we want to know further from what cause and to what end we repeat in dreams this which is known to us and has recently happened to us.” We wish to know much the same thing about television. Like dream, its brief and nonlinear visual images invoke—and also evoke—a wealth of familiar and often current material stored in the viewer’s mind.

If, for the sake of experimentation or argument, one goes along with all or most of these rough generalizations, an interesting and somewhat heretical critical perspective begins to open up. But to explore it depends upon the tentative acceptance, or at least upon the consideration, of two further and somewhat novel assumptions. The first has to do with whether television is—as we often more than half seriously say it is—a “mindless” phenomenon.

When Freud began his consideration of dreams in the 1890s, others had been involved in related speculations for several decades. But their conclusions (not unlike those of the first generation of TV critics) tended to stress the ways in which dream failed to measure up to reality. Freud wrote (all quotations are from the *General Introduction*), “they are content with the bare enumeration of the divergences of the dream-life from waking thought with a view to depreciating the dreams: They emphasize the lack of connection in the associations, the suspended exercise of the critical faculty, the elimination of all knowledge, and other indications of diminished functioning.” The mind, they concluded, was at rest, too relaxed to “make sense”; therefore, dreams were to be understood in somatic or bodily terms. Freud turned this assumption upside down. “Let us accept as the basis of the whole of our further inquiry the following hypothesis—that dreams are not a somatic, but a mental phenomenon.” He went on to ask, “but what is our justification in making this assumption? We have none, but on the other hand, there is nothing to prevent us.”

Where lack of sense, lack of importance or meaning, had been assumed, Freud postulated the opposite. But what happens if we make the same assumption about television, using the same justification; that is, “there is nothing to prevent us.” In so doing, we set aside for the moment somatic interpretations of television (TV as SOMA?), which stress the physical origins and characteristics of each show, series, or network much less of the medium as a whole. We assume that beyond inadvertency (“Some guy just came up with that line,” or “The tight budget meant they just happened to cut the scene here”), beyond specificity (“Peter Falk always acts that way,” or “All the Norman Lear shows are like that”), there also exists some larger consciousness to which television can be linked.



But what is this collective consciousness, which at some level can be said to create and to consume the images of television? Here we must add a second hypothesis. Just as our dreams, contrary to traditional logic, have been proven to be the product of our individual subconscious, so perhaps television eventually may be understood as a form of dream-equivalent within the “collective subconscious.”

Here I don’t intend a strict parallel to Jung’s similar term, although it can be suggested that television is built

around archetypes, many of them similar to the primordial images which Jung believed to be stored in the “collective unconscious” of the entire species. I refer, though, to the entity of our own American society, virtually all of whose homes are reached by television; in other words, to a single collective consciousness, sharing simultaneously in powerful ephemeral images.

It is paradoxical, but also logical; that by definition this media consciousness (of which we are all infinitely small participating parts) is not aware of the workings of its collective subconscious on the surface, but only at some lower level. That is to say, if we know about it, we don’t know we know, and I would argue that to a remarkable degree this applies just as much to the so-called “creators” as to the so-called “viewers.” As Freud wrote about the creators of individual dreams, “I assure you that it is not only quite possible, but highly probable, that the dreamer really does know the meaning of his dream; *only he does not know that he knows, and therefore thinks that he does not.*”

By implication then, it may be that *we ourselves are in some way responsible for television; we create it; more than any previous medium including drama and film, television is a vivid projection of our collective subconscious.* Obviously, in practical, individual terms, we are not “responsible” for television in whole or in part. We lack the technical understanding, the financial capacities, and perhaps even the will and insight to “create” television programs. And yet, all logic and commentary notwithstanding, we can be discovered to shape television more than it shapes us. This is true not merely in the material sense by which audiences build ratings, which sell products, which buy programs, but also in a larger and less conscious way. Much as individuals create their own dream world purposefully and unconsciously and then react to it, I speculate that a TV society creates its own video world purposefully and unconsciously and then reacts to it.

Susan Sontag, who has speculated about the relations of dream and film, suggests in *Against Interpretation* that in one sense Freud was too successful in his effort to get below the

surface of things, since the influence of psychoanalysis on artistic criticism has grown overly great. But she offers a clear summary of this powerful mode. "All observable phenomena are bracketed, in Freud's phrase, as 'manifest content.' This manifest content must be probed and pushed aside to find the true meaning—the 'latent content'—beneath." This approach can be adapted to studying television, especially in the context of what Freud called "dream-work."

Since dreams involve repressed thoughts or wishes which cannot be handled fully or directly by the conscious individual, these hidden or latent thoughts are translated through dreaming into a series of sensory and visual images. Freud defined this transformation of a wish into a dream as "dream-work," and he referred to the opposite process of unraveling the dream-work as "interpretation." It was as though a powerful message were translated into an acceptable code for presentation, and the presentation itself could then be decoded in order to discover the original message.

According to Freud, the original coding process, the dream-work, proceeds through several different means, which he called "condensation, displacement, inversion, and dramatization." Without going into his definitions, it can be said that they all apply with uncanny directness to television. If we accept the hypotheses that the media society as a whole has a consciousness like that of an individual, and that one way this collective consciousness deals with latent thoughts is by transforming them into the manifest content of television, then the processes of dream-work have their equivalents in what we might choose to call "TV-work." Let us illustrate this briefly. It hardly needs saying that *TV-work involves dramatization*, and dramatization is closer in many ways to dream-work than to the work of the single playwright. What applies to "Kojak" or "The Waltons," to Norman Lear's Associates or Mary Tyler Moore Productions, also applies to the CBS News and ABC Sports:

All prime-time television partakes heavily of dramatization.

Secondly, *TV-work involves condensation*—drastic, continuous, and creative condensation. To take one example, Rhoda Morgenstern of "Rhoda" is introduced as a "window decorator." This single tag, while entirely plausible and mundane in itself, is rich in associative meanings along several dimensions (just as Art Carney on "The Honeymooners" used to work in the sewers). Rhoda is pretty enough to decorate a window herself, but she is also competent enough to decorate windows. That is, she has a useful money-earning job outside the home, yet the job is strikingly similar in content to traditional unpaid work within the home. In fact, "window decorating" connotes all that is regarded as superficial, transparent, and peripheral about women's traditional roles.

Also, *TV-work involves displacement* (and it is interesting to assume in this regard, as one does with dreams, that the more jumbled or obscure a presentation seems to be, the more displacement there has been in the process of TV-work). As a simple example consider an element of a recent Mary Tyler Moore Show in which Mary finds herself serving dinner to Lou, her manly but insecure middle-aged boss. (In condensed TV, as in a condensed dream, one often finds oneself doing something with limited lead-in or prior explanation.) Much of MTM deals with displaced sexual wishes—the show used to be introduced by a song about "making it." Among the things Mary wants to have at this Friday night rendezvous is a bottle of champagne, and the visual imagery and verbal dialogue of the scene, heavy with double meanings, focuses around how to open the bottle satisfactorily. Lou, uncertain but pretending to know how to do it, receives friendly encouragement and guidance from the more experienced and competent Mary. When he finally holds the large bottle erect in front of him and uncorks it, the prized liquid comes bubbling out, giving Mary pleasure and transforming Lou's anxiety to satisfaction. The entire sequence, lasting only a few seconds, can be interpreted as wish fulfillment for both sexes around the prevalent concern of male impotence, all displaced in an

acceptable, but unmistakable, way to open a champagne bottle and the popping of its cork. The TV dream analyst need only to spend an evening or two watching to find many other such pregnant examples.

Finally, *TV-work involves inversion*—the inversion of latent thoughts into meaningful and often ambiguous verbal and visual symbols, and also, to quote Freud, the "inversion of situations or of relations existing between two persons, as though the scene were laid in a 'topsy-turvy' world." "All in the Family" illustrates this point on a regular basis. Archie's steady flow of seemingly random, but obviously meaningful, verbal slips (e.g. "the infernal revenue system") are set against a series of larger situational inversions, each of which is absurd, but not "merely" absurd. The argumentative Bunkers function through an unending series of oppositions: male-female, young-old, white-black, liberal-conservative, us-them.... Yet it is significant that the presentation of contradicting arguments invariably becomes contradictory in its own right. No one ever argues a consistent "line" despite the perpetual tone of certainty. Hence the important factor for analysis, most commentators notwithstanding, is not who comes out on which side so much as the presentation of a confusing issue.

In the final analysis, to coin a phrase, the test of all these speculations and hypotheses will be pragmatic. Their validity and usefulness must be demonstrated repeatedly over time. No one successful exercise will confirm their rightness, but then again, no single unconvincing effort will prove their wrongness.

Episodes from series repeated endlessly each night in the privacy of our homes may, when we get the hang of it, make more sense in psychological terms than in traditional dramatic terms. This would certainly put the superabundance of television sex, danger, and violence in a new light! Believe it or not, we may end up rethinking "All in the Family," "Big Eddie," and "Cannon" in wholly new terms. After all, what do those titles really mean? ■

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1939

A Very Good Year

Larry Swindell

It is a new year. Louis B. Mayer says, "I am confident that 1939 will be both the most prosperous one for the motion picture industry, and its richest in artistic achievement." Nobody pays any attention; he says it every year. But perhaps Mayer is in earnest, for he has cunningly delivered to Loews, Inc. the distribution authority for *Gone With the Wind*, to be produced by his son-in-law ... and 1939 is going to be its year. It was also a very good year for movies. To see just how good, let's have a look at the amusement pages to see what's playing in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles on the very last day of 1939.

At the first-run houses the fare includes *Ninotchka*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *Drums Along the Mohawk*, *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex*, *His Girl Friday*, *Destry Rides Again*, among others ... plus *Gone With the Wind* on a reserved-seat basis. In the neighborhood theaters are multiple runs of *The Women*, *The Roaring Twenties*, *Another Thin Man*, *The Old Maid*, *The Cat and the Canary*, *Babes in Arms*, *Intermezzo*, and *First Love*. If we look closely, we can find *Bachelor Mother*, *Stanley and Livingstone*, and *Goodbye Mr. Chips* still playing somewhere. One house in each metropolitan area is reeling off *The Wizard of Oz* (an August release) as a long-running holdover. Two Columbia pictures, both filmed in Sepiatone, can be located as a double feature: *Golden Boy* and *Only Angels Have Wings*. An art house parlays *Wuthering Heights* with an older

Samuel Goldwyn picture called *Beloved Enemy*. The coupling of *Stagecoach* with *Allegheny Uprising*, both teaming John Wayne and Claire Trevor, hints of a shrewd exhibitor since the two films have different distributors. And RKO has already discovered its surefire reissue formula: *Gunga Din* consorting with *King Kong*. If ever there was a week to be stranded in a big city with nothing to do but go to the movies, this was the week.

People went to the movies about as often as they could afford. In 1939 times were getting better so moviegoers went frequently, but it probably escaped their awareness that film entertainment had spiraled to its highest standard. It would remain for history to sanctify 1939 as preeminent—as "The Year of the Movies." It has taken a while for the truth to be cemented. A dozen years ago casual reference to 1939 as the "best" year for movies might have provoked blinking curiosity or rank disbelief. Not now. The people who pursue serious ongoing study of the American film legacy remark on the 1939 supremacy as common knowledge. Andrew Sarris has called it the *annum mirabilis*.

Was it an accident? Why was there a sudden flowering that would render the 1939 film census astonishingly superior to the films of 1938, after the Hollywood standard had held constant for perhaps half-a-dozen years? And why, also suddenly, was there a deterioration in quality that would make the 1940 crop compare only poorly? Finally, why did the movies never regain their 1939 performance



level? It was no accident. There are logical answers. On simplistic terms, 1939 was the apogee—the midpoint as well as the high point of what is now romanticized as the movies' Golden Age.

Refresher courses in domestic sociology and world history enhance an understanding of why our movies reached a zenith that was so brilliant yet so brief. To decode 1939, we must track the events of 1938. It had been a hopeful year—not really prosperous, but auguring a likely recovery from the Great Depression, which had choked the decade. National unemployment was at last on the decline, more money was in circulation, and there was no appreciable increase in prices. The year's movie receipts reflected the optimism. As a consequence, the banking interests that underwrote the studio ventures became more lenient, both in direct funding and in muffling their customary adversary relationship to the producer-distributors. The studios, in turn, were more likely to indulge the whims of a movie director who courted prestige on the one hand, and innovation on the other.

The commercial vitality of the theatrical film has always been an inducement to its artistic potential. Hollywood was never more industrially confident than in 1938-39, and directors with talent and zeal seized their opportunity. The creative filmmaker of solid reputation could bargain for, and attain, virtual autonomy—following the lead of Frank Capra in his relationship with Columbia. John Ford once said that he had complete control of *Stagecoach*

Bette Davis in Dark Victory is a willful socialite, doomed by a brain tumor, who falls misguidedly in love with Humphrey Bogart.

(nominally produced by Walter Wanger) from the inception of the story idea to the composition of the release print; and comparable authority for his next project, *Young Mr. Lincoln*, for Darryl Zanuck at Twentieth Century-Fox. The Lincoln picture, like *Stagecoach*, was nearly Ford's own conception, while his other 1939 credit for Twentieth Century-Fox—*Drums Along the Mohawk*—constituted an "assignment." Yet again he functioned as director with little artistic consultation or interference.

Ernst Lubitsch with *Ninotchka* and Capra with *Mr. Smith* were also at top form. So were George Stevens (*Gunga Din*), Lewis Milestone (*Of Mice and Men*), William Wyler (*Wuthering Heights*), Leo McCarey (*Love Affair*), George Cukor (*The Women*), and Howard Hawks (*Only Angels Have Wings*). There were typically positive results from such busy studio reliables as Michael Curtiz, Clarence Brown, Raoul Walsh, John Cromwell, Sam Wood, Edmund Goulding, and Woody Van Dyke, not to ignore Victor Fleming, whose ledger is studied by *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone With the Wind*.

Hollywood in 1939 represented a true industrial

*Below: Joan Fontaine, Norma Shearer in George Cukor's adaptation of Clare Booth's *The Women*.*



*Clark Gable at this point in *Gone With the Wind* was clearly giving a damn about Vivien Leigh. And vice versa.*



*Left: Marlene Dietrich changed from femme fatale to a raucous saloon singer in *Destry Rides Again*.*

*Who else but Astaire and Rogers in *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle*?*



*Above: Greta Garbo and Melvyn Douglas are the amorous couple in Lubitsch's *Ninotchka*.*



*Left: Henry Fonda as the backwoods lawyer in John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*.*



(Left to right) Geraldine Fitzgerald, Laurence Olivier, Leo G. Carroll, Flora Robson in William Wyler's *Wuthering Heights*.

Cary Grant, Victor McLaglen, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., in George Stevens's *Gunga Din*.

Irene Dunne, Charles Boyer in McCarey's delightfully sentimental *Love Affair*.



establishment. There is a formula that offers tantalizing evidence of intramural communication among the seven giant corporations that almost prohibitively comprised it. Four studios—Paramount, Warner Bros., Twentieth Century-Fox, and Columbia—were committed to a production rhythm of fifty-two pictures a year, one a week. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and RKO Radio turned out four pictures per month, forty-eight annually. Universal's yearly quota was forty-four features. In addition, United Artists, as primary distributor for major independent producers, released seventeen films in 1939. All together that's exactly 365 pictures, or one for each day of the year. Although nearly five hundred so-called feature films (exclusive of short products and serials) were ground out of the Hollywood mills in 1939, the solvent seven studios effectively directed the traffic. Furthermore, the "Big Five" that controlled most theaters—Paramount, Loew's (MGM), Warners, RKO, and Fox—concentrated on features affixed to "major" production budgets, supplemented by the program pictures that represented about one-third of their output. On the other hand, Columbia and Universal specialized in the economically manufactured "B" pictures, providing the Big Five with the lower halves for situations committed to double-feature policy. No doubt this was an effective formula, but it was jeopardized, if not actually scuttled, in the 1939 autumn when Congress passed the Neely Bill prohibiting block book-

ing, after the studios had already steeled themselves for a retrenchment program.

Despite the likelihood that every picture released in 1939 would turn a profit, by the end of the year the outlook had shifted from exceptionally promising to precarious. At the dawn of 1939, the Hollywood product was still being marketed around the world, with western Europe the primary source of foreign revenue. The trade formula no longer included Nazi Germany, and occasionally an American film would be denied an audience in Fascist Spain or in the Soviet Union. But Hollywood fare was extremely popular on most of the Continent, particularly in France and the Low Countries. Italy, too, had been a potent market; but with the Hitler-Mussolini entente after the 1938 Munich conference, the major U.S. distributors withdrew in unison from Italy in mid-1939. That alone was enough to give the financiers pause, but the deadly stroke occurred in the fall when Germany attacked Poland. World War II was underway, and Europe was lost to American moviemakers.

With the exhibition formula essentially confined to the Western Hemisphere, the Hollywood studios suffered economic setbacks. Production supervisors were capitulating once more to increasing demands by the New York home offices and the inevitable bankers. The domino effect was that the directors sacrificed the autonomy they had briefly savored. Now there was also pressure from the federal government: The theatrical film became a propaganda agent as Hollywood helped the American people prepare emotionally and psychologically for war. This trend actually had its genesis in 1939 with the sensational Warner production of Anatole Litvak's *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*.

Pictures released in the early months of 1940 still emit the incandescence of artistic purity that embellished the 1939 product. *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Rebecca*, *The Shop Around the Corner*, and *The Great Dictator* had all gone into production during the prevailing optimism. But the creative recession was evident during the second half of 1940 and was even more pronounced in 1941, *Citizen Kane* notwithstanding. Hollywood's masters never regained their sovereignty, and the anticipated postwar recovery was crippled by the advent of television, then by the Supreme Court. When the production companies were forced to sell their theatrical holdings, the production-distribution-exhibition monopoly, the guaranteed formula, was jettisoned. Production became vassal to conservative philosophy. The studio system was dead, although not yet buried. That system, for all its well-advertised failings, had many commendable qualities, especially its built-in quality control.

Taken all together, the films of 1939 are the best argument for the studio system.

January: The year's first smash hit (at the cash register) offers Tyrone Power as the Zanuck conception of *Jesse James*, with Henry Fonda essaying brother Frank, and Henry King directing. The first "prestige" picture is *Idiot's Delight*, and it doesn't please those who think that the Bob Sherwood play was a great antiwar statement, or that movie stars should be compared with the Lunts. The Shearer-Gable edition stresses merriment, smartly shaped by Clarence Brown for no more than its worth. January's best entry, though, is probably RKO's *The Great Man Votes*. Everyone in filmland knows that John Barrymore is a fallen giant, mentally unreliable and physically ravaged by drink; but somehow Garson Kanin, a fairly new but resourceful director, coaxes an enjoyable and touching performance from the Great Profile and cashes in on a sleeper.

David O. Selznick has owned the property for a thousand days, yet he still hasn't cast Scarlett O'Hara. But at the old RKO Pathé studio on Washington Boulevard, they clear the ground so Tara can be built. They're setting fire to some old sets, and shooting it as the burning of Atlanta. Production is underway for GWTW.

February brings in *Gunga Din* and *Made for Each Other*, with nothing in common except supremacy in their respective genres. The Kipling business is the most expensive picture RKO has made (\$2 million) but will become its most profitable as well. For George Stevens, who has an emerging reputation on a smaller scale, it's a triumphant outdoors audition. At least one moment out of *Gunga Din* will be elevated to popular folklore: Cary Grant making his unarmed presence known to that temple full of bloodthirsty fanatics with a swaggering "You're under arrest, the whole lot of ya!"

Made for Each Other, believably quiet even in its comical moments, has more serious ones that are sustained by the beauty of the Carole Lombard and James Stewart performances, and by the urgently sympathetic direction of John Cromwell whose films are always underscored by truthfulness in acting. Its only compromise with phoniness is an interpolated flying sequence, in order to deliver the rare serum to save the baby. Cromwell calls it "the best of my (eight) Selznick pictures," because the producer was too busy with the *GWTW* planning to interfere.

Now Selznick has an English girl playing Scarlett, and nobody seems happy about it, least of all the American South.

March: Ford's innovative western, *Stagecoach*, introduces elements, characters, and character relationships that will become conventions, if not clichés, of the genre. Because it is a photographic masterpiece, its reputation will grow in years to come as it is studied and imitated but not emulated.

It is the oracle of John Wayne's destiny as a folk hero, and the performances of Claire Trevor and Thomas Mitchell will remain luminous.

Selznick has fired George Cukor as director for *GWTW*. He says it's because Cukor was working too slowly and going over budget, but it may have been to appease Clark Gable, who wasn't getting along with Cukor. One of Gable's MGM pals, Victor Fleming, has taken over the direction but he hasn't taken charge, because Selznick won't let him. Already the fur is flying....

April: *Dark Victory* carries Bette Davis to the top of her form. Judith Traherne is rich and irresponsible until she discovers the secret of her impending physical doom, and her noble substance surfaces. Here is the kind of picture that will acquire a "dated" stigma as the years pass by, and the word for Davis is performance: She exhibits a full bag of tricks. It is no less impressive. For contrast, the brilliance of Geraldine Fitzgerald in her first American role should not be overlooked in this Warner model.

All of the New York critics seem to agree with Otis Ferguson that *Wuthering Heights* is a rare masterpiece. At the end of the year they will select it as the best picture against *GWTW* among many worthy others. Sam Goldwyn, who failed to sell Anna Sten to America and hasn't really succeeded in his campaign on behalf of Merle Oberon, hires a varsity crew—William Wyler and Gregg Toland, and Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur to adapt Emily Brontë's novel—and then provides his leading lady with an impeccable cast of fellow Britons. The public will not respond to the critics' urging, and Goldwyn loses interest in Oberon despite her good notices as Catherine Earnshaw. But many years hence, Sam will die believing it the finest picture he ever produced, and most will agree with him. *Wuthering Heights* inhabited within its frame a magnificence that cannot be denied; and there is always Laurence Olivier's Heathcliff—a devastating presence.

They say that Selznick himself is doing day-to-day rewriting on the *GWTW* script. The production has become a scandal. Vivien Leigh, writing to friends in England, senses disaster.

May: The Warner interests have spent a fortune trying to convince us that *Juarez* is the cinematic milestone of the age. You can fool some of the people all of the time. Even as they droop and nod during its plodding progress, they remain mostly convinced. A third of a century later, many will still nourish the notion that it was some kind of great picture. It is a turkey, with Muni frozen in nonperformance lest his splendid makeup crumble, and Davis letting her wretchedness show while Brian Aherne's Maximilian steals the picture by default.

Its antithesis is Columbia's *Only Angels Have Wings*. The 1939 audience accepts it as a corking

adventure yarn and lets it go at that. But Howard Hawks is directing from his own original story, and auteurs will champion it as his quintessential film, defining the master's views on man in his relationship with his woman, his fellow man, and his job. It's a risky business about flying rickety planes through dangerous Latin American mountain passes, and it plays peculiar havoc with the pecking order of stardom. After Grant and Arthur give winning accounts of themselves, Richard Barthelmess makes a surprise appearance at midfilm and dominates the rest of the footage with extraordinary authority while the stars fade politely into the background.



DeMille maintains his one-a-year rhythm for Paramount with *Union Pacific*. It's a vogue for critics to sneer at DeMille, and they'll chip around until they find some flaws in his paean to the railway pioneers. They aren't fooled by Barbara Stanwyck's Irish brogue or the incredulous survival of the stars while the Indians sack the wrecked train. The public, of course, loves it. They like Stanwyck and Joel McCrea, and DeMille's new find, Robert Preston. Well, years will pass and more astute critics will decide that this time the public was right. Even those who scorn DeMille's body of work will concede its vitality and cinematic pageantry. Here is real sweep—his least artificial epic, almost great.

Astaire and Rogers tell *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle*, and their public senses and appreciates that it's their last appearance as a team (until their capricious, one-shot reunion at MGM a decade hence). It isn't one of their best RKO pictures, but it will do. It's their only occasion to portray a real (dancing) couple, and they are as personally winning as ever.

The news in June is that Fleming has walked off the *GWTW* set. The Selznick office reports that the director has suffered a physical breakdown from working so hard, and that Sam Wood will replace him "temporarily." Fleming says he has only suffered a pain where he usually sits, and that he won't be back....

June: Yields a single masterpiece. It's Ford again, and the unaffected eloquence of Fonda, so right as *Young Mr. Lincoln*. It is essentially built around a single case showing our man of destiny as a disarming, commonsensical lawyer winning a difficult case. Ford makes the motion picture a medium of poetry. It is well liked, but both press and public take it for granted. The future film generation will know better.

Fleming returns to the *GWTW* set, but it's strictly business and no labor of love. Selznick is retaining Sam Wood and has two units working simulta-

neously. He's determined to bring in the picture under four million, sometime in July....

The only whopper-sized **July** release is a favorite silent film reincarnated as a talking dud. The Foreign Legion trappings guarantee its commercial charter, especially for the juvenile trade; but Gary Cooper plays *Beau Geste* with a diffidence rare for him, and the Paramount entry seems undirected by William Wellman. Michael Curtiz, though, does handsomely by one of his less splashy Warner assignments, *Daughters Courageous*. It will be forgotten but deserves remembrance. It's a worldly-wise elegance shot mostly in Carmel (by James Wong Howe) with the season's most cynically adult screenplay (by Julius and Philip Epstein). The public is confused, expecting a sequel to *Four Daughters*, which it isn't despite its identical cast—with an abundance of sisters named Lane, and unalloyed performances from Claude Rains and John Garfield.

August: MGM takes us over the rainbow and down the yellow brick road to the Emerald City. *The Wizard of Oz* has had a troubled production history, with several good men taking on direction responsibility in turn, and each pleading lack of confidence. Only one will be credited: Victor Fleming, who left the project when *GWTW* summoned. Even though the first screening of the edited print confirms that *Oz* has style, production excellence, and likely appeal, there's doubt that it can return a profit on its \$2 million investment. L. B. Mayer, they say, still grieves over Fox's refusal to lend him Shirley Temple to play Dorothy. Neither the Technicolor rendering of L. Frank Baum's beloved children's fantasy nor its Garland girl can improve with time's passing; but then, perfection never tarnishes.

Selznick, who sent his actors home in July but has been retaking some of the *GWTW* establishing scenes and tableaux, has processed half-a-million feet of film and the editing goes on, into September....

September: Clare Booth's witty Broadway study of rich bitchiness, *The Women*, finds an ideal screen catalyst in Cukor. His celebrity as a "woman's director" meets its climactic test with not a single male in the camera's path, but a lot of Shearer, Russell, Crawford, Goddard, Fontaine, and Mary Boland. An unmitigated triumph all around.

Two other well-regarded plays make the transition to film more or less successfully in September. Directed again by Edmund Goulding, Bette Davis as *The Old Maid* has another gaudy role and a vehicle almost as good as *Dark Victory* and even more a magnet for patrons. Reviewers agree that co-star Miriam Hopkins matches Davis every step of the way, and reports of their being antagonists off the screen as well as on appear verified by a bonus of tension in their scenes together. Columbia puts top money on Clifford Odets's *Golden Boy*

and engages a recently inactive Rouben Mamoulian as director. It gains a large audience, which finds plenty to respond to, including the Lorna Moon portrayal that showcases Stanwyck's maximum authority; but most of the attention is to twenty-one-year-old William Holden, chosen after a much-publicized search for a newcomer to play the title role—the violinist who wants to be a prize-fighter.

At the moment, though, the front-runner in the Academy Award sweepstakes seems to be the annual Capra event—*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, an **October** release. The critics throw their typewriters into the air. The man of the moment is James Stewart, here ideally teamed with Capra's favorite actress, Jean Arthur. The *Smith* screenplay is by Sidney Buchman, prodding the suggestion that Robert Riskin's value to Capra may have been overstated.

They've set the *GWTW* world premiere for Atlanta in mid-December, to be followed by Christmas-week openings on both coasts....

The holiday season is prime time, so the studios have an abundance of pampered "specials" to carry the Thanksgiving-to-New Year period. **November's** most glistening jewel is MGM's *Ninotchka*, a Lubitsch hallmark. We don't know it at the time, but it is also Garbo's last golden hour, although it is not her last picture. It is her first comedy. Is she a gifted comedienne? It's hard to say, but she is a brilliant instinctive actress for the camera, and Lubitsch knows precisely how to choreograph her within a framework of merriment. The Charles Brackett-Billy Wilder script contains the year's best dialogue on satirical terms, and the brightest on any other. Melvyn Douglas, with less billing but more footage, is next to indispensable. But one perceives that only with Garbo could the whole business about Soviet communists capitulating to the corruptive joys of Paris have been brought off so effectively.

Transcribed in Technicolor from the Walter Edmonds novel which ran second to Margaret Mitchell's on the bestseller charts, *Drums Along the Mohawk* is the year's third Ford picture. With Fonda and Colbert in the foreground, and Edna May Oliver assisting keenly, it's endorsed by the critics who nevertheless underrate it. It's the screen's most persuasive account of the American Revolution, not from a sight-line on textbook heroes, but on the common people who were no less vital to its success.

With the main story filing out of Atlanta, some formidable **December** entries are upstaged if not completely obscured. Even if it gets swamped at the box office, *Of Mice and Men* is a critically acclaimed curiosity. Of all people, comedy-maker Hal Roach produced it; and his director is Lewis Milestone, recently inactive and possibly over the hill. Its George (Burgess Meredith) and Lenny (Lon Chaney, Jr.) are less than stars, even though

some ranking male players sought the roles in a picture that could have used some commercial insurance. In its immediate aftermath, *Of Mice and Men* will seem to have restored Milestone, but not helped any of its players other than Betty Field—a dramatic revelation as Curly's wife. In the future this rendering of John Steinbeck's simple rural parable will never look out of place in any accounting of Hollywood's most admirable prewar films.

Although it isn't calculated to capture any awards, Universal's *Destry Rides Again* rates as a real surprise and may be one of those happy accidents that catches even the producers off guard. They had the good sense to realize what they had before they put it into release. It seems to have gone into production with a screenplay reading like a straight western without comic overtones; with a director (George Marshall) whose twenty years of seasoning haven't yielded a credit to court the memory; and a leading lady who hasn't been on the screen since her "washed up" condemnation more than two years ago. Watching the picture, it's hard to say just when it transforms into spoofing, but eventually all the players seem to be in on the secret—the diverse likes of Brian Donlevy, Mischa Auer, Charles Winninger, and a scene-stealing Samuel Hinds, not to mention the year's workhorse male star James Stewart, or the rejuvenated Marlene Dietrich. She is perhaps the only screen personality in whom self-parody is often welcome, and here she indulges in it for the first time.

But December belongs to *Gone With the Wind*, and the official sanctification of success sets its legend in motion. People who don't take movies seriously are of a general opinion that it must be the best one ever made.

Most Americans, but Southerners above all, resented the casting of Vivien Leigh. That resentment evaporates during the opening sequence on the steps of Tara, and the Leigh performance will endure above criticism and exist beyond it. The Rhett Butler character is so aligned to the Gable persona that his performance will not be immediately seen for the fine and even noble thing that it is. Nor is there initial appreciation of Leslie Howard's Ashley as the personification of the defeated South. The achievement of Olivia de Havilland's Melanie is never in doubt; a beautiful rendering of believability to an almost unbelievable role. To those who were enthralled as readers of the novel, the playing of the famous leading characters would seem most vital to the picture working well. Actually it is more than incidental, but not the real key to the movie's timeless appeal.

Ultimately it will be even more famous as a movie than it has been as a novel. *Gone With the Wind* will stand as proof that screen art in 1939 can be produced. It is Selznick's picture more than Fleming's or even Margaret Mitchell's. The producer is responsible for the picture's overriding trait: its masterful *shape*. People will say it is a picture that has everything. The truth is that everything it has is testimonial to Hollywood craftsman-

ship. *Gone With the Wind* synthesizes everything that the moviemakers have learned toward making the artificial seem excitingly real. If it ever ceases to be a capital entertainment for patrons attuned to some future technological criteria for film (which seems unlikely), it will prevail as a magnificent museum piece, the grandest illustration of Hollywood at the peak of its definition.

The irony is that in the moment of *GWTW*, neither Hollywood nor the world realizes that the peak has been scaled and that a long downward journey is just beginning. Even though it is an independently made picture, it glorifies the studio system, much as Margaret Mitchell's fiction glorified the antebellum South. The system, too, will be gone with the wind only too soon.

The men and women who made the movies and shaped the destiny of the theatrical film learned their crafts professionally well, but most of them—and the best of them—were without creative pretentiousness. Art is most happily achieved when it is not the objective. The prewar emphasis was on entertainment. But if art can be both commercial and pure, the screen accomplished that, and the films of 1939 are poised on the crest of that accomplishment, before the postwar film succumbed to artiness. While the lights were going out in Europe, we reveled in Hollywood's brightest glow. ■

Author of *Screwball: The Life of Carole Lombard*, Larry Swindell is Book Editor of *The Philadelphia Enquirer*.

The Wicked Witch begins to melt away in The Wizard of Oz, as the Cowardly Lion, the Tin Woodsman, and the Scarecrow look on with trepidation.



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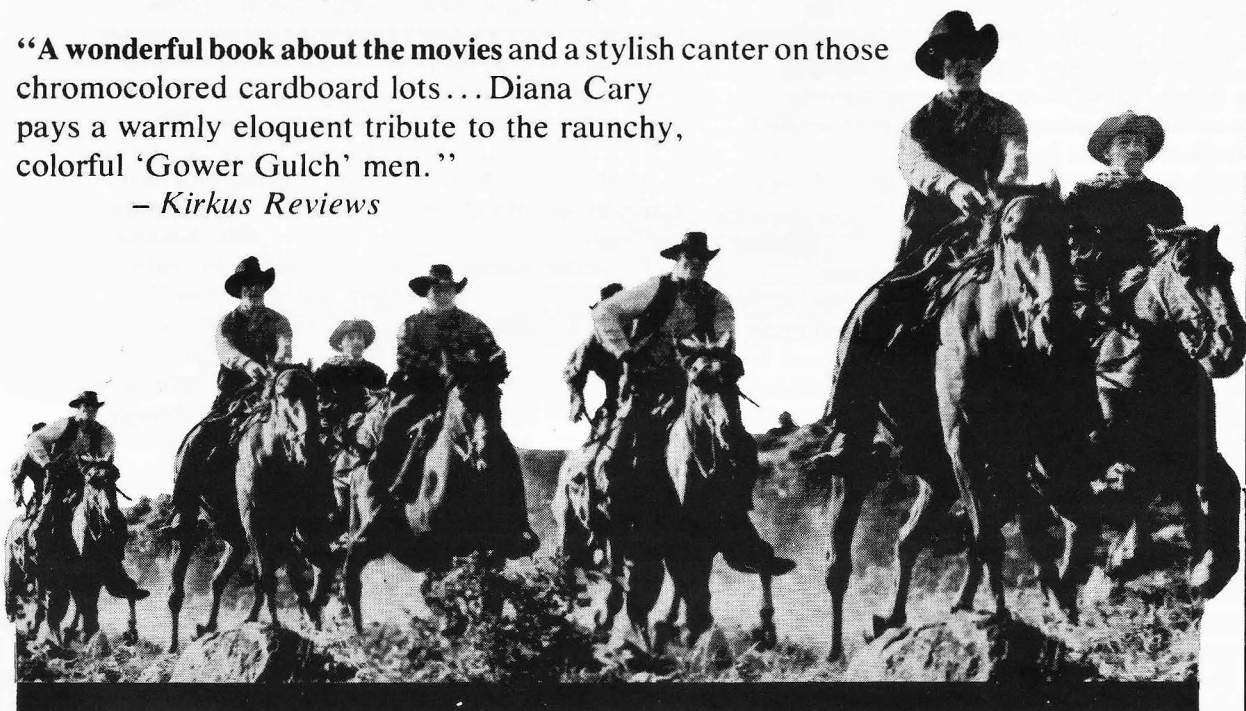
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Dialogue on Film



Robert Towne

An inquiry into the arts and crafts of filmmaking through interview seminars between Fellows and prominent filmmakers held at Greystone, under the auspices of The American Film Institute's Center for Advanced Film Studies. This educational series is directed by James Powers.

Robert Towne, a screenwriter who has emerged into prominence during the past few years, can be considered a member of the Roger Corman "generation," in that it was Corman who provided his first opportunity to write for film. Among others who owe their beginnings to Corman, a producer and director who has specialized in horror films, are Francis Ford Coppola, Jack Nicholson, and Peter Bogdanovich. Towne met Corman (and also Jack Nicholson) in an acting class conducted by Jeff Corey, perhaps the most noted teacher of acting in Los Angeles. Corey's precepts and methods were (and are) considered of value by other than actors.

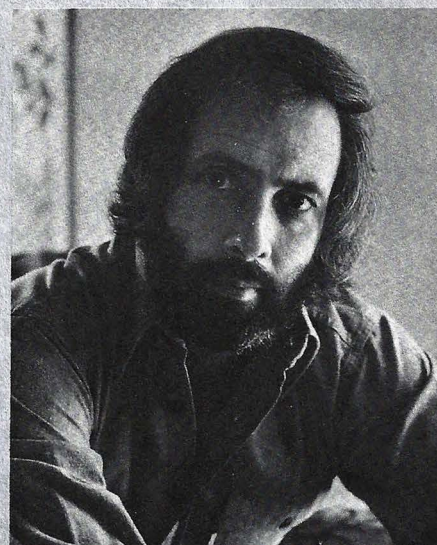
The first script written by Towne for Corman never saw the light of the screen, but Towne went on to work on another, *The Tomb of Ligeia*, adapted from a Poe story, directed by Corman, and starring Vincent Price. Although Towne is not particularly proud of that maiden effort, Corman experts regard the film as rather superior to the general

run. Towne then drifted into television writing, working on shows such as "The Man From U.N.C.L.E.," "Outer Limits," and "Breaking Point." It was a period he recalls as unhappy.

Born in 1935 in Los Angeles, Towne grew up in nearby San Pedro. While studying English literature at Pomona College in Claremont, he wrote short stories, but by the time he left college he had decided he wanted, more than anything else, to write screenplays. This ambition was delayed by a term of army service, during which he was assigned to military intelligence.

For a time, Towne was best known as a script doctor. In fact, his relationship with Warren Beatty began because of an interest Beatty took in a western Towne had rewritten for Columbia Pictures. When Beatty transferred his affections from the western to *Bonnie and Clyde* (as producer and star) he asked Towne to restructure the original Robert Benton and David Newman screenplay and to rewrite certain of its scenes. Towne received no screen credit for his work, but Hollywood insiders were aware of his contribution, and he suffered no lack of job opportunities. Towne's rewriting capabilities were called upon for *The Godfather*, and, while he again received no screenwriting credit, Coppola gave him due acknowledgment when he received an Oscar for the screenplay of that film. For his revision of *The Yakuza*, a less than distinguished Japanese gangster film, Towne did share screenplay credit with Paul Schrader.

Then, in hardly more than a year, three films appeared written solely by Towne. *The Last Detail*, starring



Towne's close friend, Jack Nicholson, is a salty tale of two sailors escorting a third to naval prison. Critics found it both hilarious and touching. For it, Towne received his first Academy nomination. *Chinatown*, with echoes of Hammett and Chandler, is a tale of Byzantine corruption set in the Los Angeles of the thirties; it again starred Jack Nicholson. Critically acclaimed and a box-office winner, *Chinatown* brought Towne an Academy Award in 1974 for "Best Original Screenplay." His most recent film, *Shampoo*, reunited him with Warren Beatty. Released by Columbia, it was glowingly reviewed and has gone on to enormous financial success. He is currently engaged on a screenplay which will give a new and original twist to the Tarzan story.

Below: The wielder of the knife in Chinatown is director Roman Polanski, in the process of slitting Jack Nicholson's nostril. Roy Jenson is the fellow thug. Nicholson is the only film star ever to play a dozen scenes with a bandaged nose.

Question: Let's begin with the already famous ending of *Chinatown*. The ending on the screen isn't the one you originally wrote—Roman Polanski intervened.

Towne: As I originally wrote it, *Chinatown* didn't end in Chinatown. In fact there wasn't one scene that took place there. But one horrible day at the studio about two weeks before shooting, everybody went crazy, and someone said, "My God, there's no scene in Chinatown, and it's *called* Chinatown." Of course I felt that was fine—and in a way the point: It was not a location but a state of mind. To have a scene there would be pushing the metaphor. The meeting was insane. Somebody even said, "Well, maybe if Gittes liked Chinese food..." Finally, at this meeting, where some normally very bright people lost their heads, it was collectively agreed—but not by me—that the film should end in Chinatown.

Question: In your original version, who killed whom?

Towne: Originally, I had Evelyn kill her father. Gittes tried to stop her but was too late. But he did succeed in getting her daughter out of the country. So the ending was bittersweet in that one person at least—the child—wasn't tainted. The one thing the woman had been trying to do—the purest motive in the whole film—was to protect her daughter. When she carried out this motive by killing her father, she was acting out of motherly love. You knew she was going to stand trial, that she wouldn't tell why she did it, and that she would be punished. But the larger crime—the crime against the whole community—would go unpunished. And, in a sense, that was the point. There are some crimes for which you get punished, and there are some crimes that our society isn't equipped to punish, and so we reward the criminals. In this case, greedy men displaced a whole community and took the land. So there's really nothing to do but put their names on plaques and make them pillars of the community. It was this balance I was looking for.

Question: Did you rewrite the ending yourself?



Right: Faye Dunaway, about at the end of her rope in Chinatown. This is the only scene that actually takes place in Chinatown. She's aiming the gun at her father.



Towne: More or less, though I was arguing while I was doing it. A very tricky thing happens when you're doing a film. A director comes along, and you recognize that a transference has to take place, and he has to conceive of the film as his film. You just hope that your visions will complement his and be consistent with each other. So I said "OK," and the film ends the way it does. My own feeling is if a scene is relentlessly bleak—as the revised ending is—it isn't as powerful as it can be if there's a little light there to underscore the bleakness. If you show something decent happening, it makes what's bad almost worse.

For example, *The Last Detail* ends up badly, but along the way there is a certain amount of warmth, friendship, good times, a concern for each other, people being decent. This serves to accentuate that in the end all those things go by the boards. If there's going to be a tunnel at the end of the light, you want to have some light before you get there. In a melodrama, where there are confrontations between good and evil—if the evil is too triumphant, it destroys your ability to identify with it rather than if its victory is only qualified. I'm making no relationship to anything I've done, but if you read a great tragedy like *King Lear*, you see what makes it so effective are all the little kindnesses along the way, the Fool and Cordelia, the virtuous daughter. Ultimately, goodness gets destroyed, but its ongoing presence lends a reality to the presence of evil.

Question: How did you take the changes in *Chinatown*?

Towne: It was heartbreaking. But there's no way out of it with films because they are collaborative. You can't pretend they're not. You can just hope that what your quarrels are about are not the central vision but the ways of getting there.

Question: How did *Chinatown* come about? Was it your idea?

Towne: Yes. It came about because Columbia decided to put off the filming of *The Last Detail*. The studio was suddenly frightened of anything in which the language was socially taboo or the scenes were sexually explicit. But I wouldn't change the language in the script, and I had some leverage then at Columbia because Jack Nicholson was willing to go along with what I wanted. So it was sort of a Mexican standoff. Meanwhile, I conceived of a detective film because I wanted to direct. I thought that no matter how bad a director I was, at least if I could tell a detective story, I could keep people interested. But once you say you want to do a detective movie, you start thinking about crime, what it means to you, what you think really is a crime, what angers you. The destruction of the land and the destruction of a community was something I thought was hideous. It was doubly significant because it was the way Los Angeles was formed.



Question: Granted that that's what you were after, yet an audience ideally needs to bring to *Chinatown* some knowledge of the Owens Valley war and the history of L.A. In the final film, the destruction of the land doesn't seem as strong as it might be.

Towne: It isn't. Maybe if Roman and I had been able to work more closely for a longer period of time, we might've been a little more explicit. I don't know.

Question: What source did you use?

Towne: I started with Carey McWilliams's book, then went to Morrow Mayo and several tracts. I read some of the Department of Water and Power's own accounts which rationalized and justified what happened. I talked to a couple of people in the Water Department, one of whom got very angry, and who'd been there at the time. I must've read accounts in at least a dozen different places, including Mary Austin's fictionalized version in *The Ford*.

Question: Did you draw on the research for particular scenes or locations?

Towne: No. A lot of the river bed material, for example, came about because I lost a dog and was chasing it down a river bed near Downey. I grew up in San Pedro and a lot of the locations that I wrote



Above: Otis Young and Jack Nicholson in pursuit of the runaway prisoner they are escorting in The Last Detail. Below, with Randy Quaid, now firmly, but sympathetically on the way to his detention.

in I chose because I knew they were there and I knew that they hadn't changed.

Question: Did you have any collaboration with Richard and Anthea Sylbert, who did such fine work on the period setting and costuming?

Towne: Not specifically. They just made everything better. For example, they insisted—on principle—on playing down the period, on not being obtrusive or pushy in dressing people in the style. If you look at a movie made in 1937, nobody does a close-up of the dashboard and says, "Oh, we've got a 1937 car." It was very much in the Sylberts' minds to work that way. Anthea is also terrific in her sense of the makeup people should use. She had battles with Roman over Faye Dunaway's makeup. She was very much against the heavy makeup used on Faye in certain scenes, and she was quite right. The character was a sort of California Yankee. She would not have gone in for a heavily marcelled style. The Sylberts are extraordinary. They always make contributions beyond their own work. On *Shampoo* I would find myself, as I was rewriting, showing scenes to Anthea before anybody else, to get not just what she thought about costumes but about the characters too. On a movie set, somebody's the director, and somebody's the set designer. But people do have ideas about other things, and sometimes they're very valuable.

Question: Let's return to the origins of *Chinatown*. Who did you first approach with the idea?

Towne: I was working on the screenplay, and I was slowly going broke. Paramount had asked me to write *The Great Gatsby*, and I told Robert Evans, then head of the studio, that I didn't want to do it, and he was mystified. He said, "Well, what are you doing that's so important you don't want to adapt *The Great Gatsby*?" I said, "I'm doing this detective movie." He liked it and was very interested in doing it, but I didn't take him up on it right away. About a month later, I was desperate and said, "If you still like it, we'll go ahead with it." He was enthusiastic, very supportive, and yet he left me alone. But I knew any hope I had of directing it was over.

Question: What was the genesis of J. J. Gittes?

Towne: In most detective movies I have ever seen—in Chandler and even Hammett—all the detectives are too gentlemanly to do divorce work. "If you want someone for that go down the block." But I knew in fact that's mostly what they did. That's how they made their money, and it's a wonderfully seamy thing to do. So I went down the block for Gittes. I thought that taking someone like that, maybe venal and crude and used to petty crime and people cheating on each other, and then getting him involved in a crime which was really

evil and allowing him to see the larger implications and then to draw the distinctions would be interesting.

Question: He's a detective who's not always very capable. Sometimes he's pretty sloppy.

Towne: Yes. But very persistent and insatiably curious. And capable within certain limits.

Question: A nosy detective? Was the slitting of his nostril and the bandaged nose your idea or Roman's?

Towne: Mine, though it does seem like something Roman would have thought of. I felt it would be very hard to take seriously any violence that was visited on the hero when you know he's going to last until the end of the movie. The only thing you can really be afraid for is his psychic safety, either emotional or moral. You might be afraid that he'll fall in love with the wrong person or that he'll do something so wrong you'll no longer be able to identify with him. But I wanted some violence in it because it goes with the genre, though I didn't want the conventional beating because that you don't care about. In the script I had the detective with the bandage on and the stitches on, but the smart thing Roman did was to follow right through with it, to not back off from it, to make it prominent. It was like painting the pole in the bathroom red. I think this was very, very shrewd of him.

Question: Besides turning out original screenplays, you've also had a successful career as a script doctor. When you were brought in to doctor *The Godfather* script, were you given certain sections or the entire screenplay?

Towne: I was given certain sections. The main problem was that there was no final scene between Michael Corleone and his father. Since he was about four or five weeks into shooting, Francis Coppola didn't know what to do about it. He kept saying, "I want a scene where they say they love each other." I couldn't write a scene with two people saying they love each other. It had to be about something, an action. So that scene in the garden between Al Pacino and Marlon Brando is what I ended up doing—a scene about the transfer of power. There were other little things which I did, but they were inconsequential.

Question: What was your responsibility on *Bonnie and Clyde*?

Towne: That was a lot more complicated. It was a long process. I was on the film for about three weeks of pre-production and all the way through the shooting.

Question: But David Newman and Robert Benton received the only credit.

Towne: That was a peculiar situation. And I don't know what would've happened if it had been arbitrated, which Warren asked me not to do. The Writer's Guild rules specify that thirty-three percent of a script has to be changed before credit can be given, and I really can't say what the final result would've been. But none of it would ever have been examined so closely if the film had not enjoyed the success it did.

Question: Were your changes mostly structural or in dialogue?

Towne: Both. I thought it was a terrific script when I first read it, but it was unformed. It all centered on a ménage à trois among Bonnie, Clyde and C.W., in which Clyde was not merely impotent, but a homosexual involved with C.W. But at the time I think there were two considerations. One was that I doubt if Warners would've made it that way. The other was that it got static. It got to be like a series of vaudeville routines—now they're in bed with so-and-so, now they're in bed with so-and-so. Although those scenes were very amusing they didn't go anywhere ultimately. What was valuable was to try to resolve the relationship between *two* people in the course of the film. And because the film had a lot of banks to rob along the way, dealing with two people was a formidable task all by itself. So both Warren and Arthur Penn judged the script to be in trouble. This was when I was asked to come in.

Question: You saw the couple's relationship as the key element?

Towne: You always knew they were going to die, so the real suspense was how and if they were going to get something resolved between them before they died. In order to do that, you had to structure their relationship toward their particular fate. Remember the scene with the undertaker and Velma? It's a terrific scene which was unchanged from the original script. After this scene, after they've been clowning around and having hamburgers and getting very cozy with each other, somebody asks Eugene what he does. He says he's an undertaker, and Bonnie says, "Get him out of here." Now the scene originally took place after she'd seen her mother. The first structural change I made was to put that scene before she'd seen her mother so the raucous escapade with the mortician brings home the fact she's afraid she's going to die and wants to see her mother. Then rather than have the family reunion happy, as it originally was, after Clyde said, "Well, we don't want to live more than three

Gene Hackman, as Clyde's brother, is on his way to oblivion here, but well on his way to screen stardom thereafter.



miles away," I had the mother reply, "If you try and live three miles from me, you won't live long." All these avenues, which Bonnie might have thought were still open, were slowly being closed. The two were thrown more and more back on themselves and on the peculiar kind of intimacy they had between them.

Question: You added new scenes?

Towne: The scene where he made love with her was a new scene. The scene in the hotel room in which she says, "I thought we were going someplace but this is just it, and we're going," was a new scene. I can't remember all of them. I was in a hotel room working on scenes every day, and I would be told, "Try it this way." My overall impression was feeling like a fool—it was one of my first jobs—because I was asked to rewrite scenes so many times—the original and my own too. I thought, "Jeez, I must be terrible," because Arthur Penn kept asking me to do it again and again. Then I realized Arthur was really using me the way a good director uses an

actor: "Try the scene this way. Try the scene that way." It was very intelligent of him.

Question: Do you find it frustrating to stay within the confines of someone else's script?

Towne: No, I don't. "Doctoring" is misleading because all scripts are rewritten, including your own. A script *has* to be rewritten. It's just a question of whether or not it's going to be rewritten well.

Question: What interested you in rewriting *The Yakuza*?

Towne: Trying to imagine someone reaching the point where he'll kill twenty-five people. Trying to make it credible that this American would go to Japan, would get involved in recovering a kidnapped girl, and then ultimately kill his best friend and twenty-five other people and immolate himself. In reading the original script, I didn't feel he was provoked in the right way to do all that. I tried to make it from my point of view and the point of view of the director, Sydney Pollack, more plausible.

Question: In working as a script doctor, what do you find are the most common problems?

Towne: One of the frustrating things about working on movies, and one of the exciting things, is that

The original script for Bonnie and Clyde posited a ménage à trois among Bonnie, Clyde, and C.W. Towne's rewrite removed the perverse implications.



Right: Carrie Fisher, in Shampoo, vies for the attentions of her mother's hairdresser.

Below: Julie Christie, seated with Warren Beatty, about to cause a sensation that will make \$30,000,000.



Above: Julie Christie, shampooed and coiffed by her hairdresser and wanton lover.





Above: Warren Beatty, somewhat in a state of shock over Julie Christie's scandalous behavior at an Election Eve party.

Below: Goldie Hawn is in love with her hairdresser. But who isn't?



Above & Below: Jack Warden, with his unfaithful wife, Lee Grant. Warren Beatty, with two of his amorous patrons.



you never have the same problems twice. Which is not to say there aren't certain principles. Generally speaking, scripts are too talky. And when there's a problem, it's usually because the script lacks clarity. Sometimes when creative people are insecure, they can get esoteric and be afraid to be understood. One of the great things about Roman Polanski—and I'm not in love with Roman on any level—is that he strives to be understood. I think that is the mark of anybody who's really gifted.

Question: But the problem in a scene isn't always clear.

Towne: One thing I've discovered is that if a scene doesn't work one way—no matter how insane it seems—do the exact opposite of what you've been doing, and it'll sometimes work. Maybe there's a scene where a man is on his knees to a woman, begging her to come back to him. It doesn't work, so instead you have him beat her up and tear up the house. It's another way of asking her to come back. Sometimes doing just the opposite works for reasons which I can't altogether understand.

Question: When you rewrite your own material, do you find it difficult to step back and take an objective view?

Towne: When I get involved in the reworking of something, I have several very close friends on whose judgment I rely. I don't know if it's true of any other kind of writing, but screenwriting has two levels, really. One is when you're initially working on the script, doing it in isolation, away from all the mechanics of the making of the movie, the presence of the actors, the production problems. Then you finish and bring it into the real world, the real-phony world which is the movie world. That's a whole different process, and I think you've got to be schizophrenic about it. At one point you're more or less the creator, and then you're part of the group of people who are trying to bring something to life. It's difficult to make the distinction sometimes, but not all that difficult if you're working with people you trust and really care for. Then it can be very exciting.

Question: You don't find that talking over the screenplay with others dissipates it for you?

Towne: There comes a point where you're confused, you don't know where you're going. Then it helps to talk. It was really true of *Chinatown*. I got lost so many times.

Question: Are there screenwriters you very much admire?

Towne: One of the first screenplays that really knocked me out was by Charles Eastman. It was called "Honey Bear, I Think I Love You." It was big, awkward, and rambling, but I'd never read

such great writing in a screenplay. It became kind of a legend, and it's never been shot. Charles was very particular about how he wanted it done—maybe too particular. I would rather have seen it filtered through somebody he didn't think was quite right than not see it at all. But Charles is an enormously gifted man. His sister, Carol, is too. I also like Isobel Lennart, who wrote *Love Me or Leave Me*, (along with Daniel Fuchs). It's an incredible screenplay. The level of sophistication is absolutely stunning. Francis Coppola, of course. Paddy Chayefsky. I think of Alvin Sargent, Frank Pierson, Wilder and Diamond, Pinter, Bolt, Ingmar Bergman, and François Truffaut—if you want I could spend the rest of this interview talking about screenwriters and screenplays I admire—including the greatest, Jean Renoir and Ben Hecht.

Question: Do you see a preference among screenwriters for doing adaptations instead of original scripts?

Towne: I think it's a typical writer's problem: You'd rather work on somebody else's mediocre material than on your own mediocre material. And in a strange way, it releases your writing abilities because you feel you don't have to take full responsibility for it. You might actually do better work because you're not stopping and worrying that it's you personally. I think it takes more courage, more stupidity—whatever you want to call it—to deal with original material.

Question: Do producers, when they're looking for material, prefer a new book over a new script?

Towne: I don't think so. I think producers—above all—and the actors who can make a movie happen, are eager to read new scripts. The chances of a good, original screenplay being sold are much greater today than ever before.

Question: In your adaptation of Darryl Ponicson's *The Last Detail*, you made an interesting change. Ponicson kills off Billy Buddusky at the end. You don't. Why not?

Towne: In the novel, the character of Buddusky was an intellectual. He secretly read Camus. He also had a beautiful wife in New York. He was a very atypical sailor who had a kind of Whitmanesque appreciation of the sea. I wanted to tell a story about typical people, not atypical people. Without saying it or trying to be pushy about it, I wanted to imply that we're all lifers in the navy, and that we will go along and be helpful to someone if our kindness or our courtesy doesn't cost us too much and if it flatters our vanity. We'll get this kid laid, we'll buy him a few beers, we'll let him have a good time if that makes him think more of us, but we won't risk our neck. And all we'll do is feel a little guilty and cover it up by saying, "I hate this chicken-shit detail."

But people always hide behind their jobs when they have to do something unpleasant. Those on the detail were no better than they ought to be and no worse. But they were not particularly courageous. Nobody is. I thought it would be dishonest to let the sailor off or to have the others feel so badly they would go awol or get themselves killed. I also thought this would let the audience off the hook. "Gee, we're not so bad. We let the guy go."

Question: Earlier you indicated that the strong language is central to the movie. Why?

Towne: All the socially taboo language was necessary. From the time Rhett Butler said, "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn," in *Gone With the Wind*, it has usually been the case that socially taboo language in film was for dramatic emphasis. But in fact, in *The Last Detail*, it was used for exactly the opposite reasons. In the army you swear a lot precisely because you are impotent. When Columbia said that wouldn't it be better to have twenty "motherfuckers" instead of forty "motherfuckers," I said no, because then you'd lose the point that these men can't do anything more than swear. The repetitiousness is an index of their inability to do anything else.

Question: Did you have Jack Nicholson in mind when you wrote the screenplay?

Towne: Yes. I love to write for him. But Jack is a unique case for me because we've known each other for so long. Jack and I were in acting class together years ago—Jeff Corey's—and I saw him work two or three times a week for several years, and I got to know him extremely well.

Question: Did the quick cutting style in *The Last Detail* evolve from the script? For example, in the hotel room.

Towne: That scene was a problem. It was too long as written and too long as played. I think the playing could've been brisker in the train scene, too. You can get lulled into saying, "Jesus, that's terrific," and then find it just goes on too long.

Question: *Shampoo* was an original idea?

Towne: Yes and no. Warren Beatty and I were talking one day about what would be a current adaptation of *The Country Wife*, Wycherley's Restoration comedy. It's a wonderful play about a man called Horner who lets it be known throughout all of social London that his doctor, Doctor Quack, has rendered him a eunuch. Consequently, all the husbands trust Horner with their wives, which is a big mistake. He's in fine shape. We talked about it, and Warren said, "Well, what would be the contemporary equivalent? An actor?" I said, "No, it would be a hairdresser." That was how the story originated.

Question: You must know a fascinating hairdresser somewhere.

Towne: I've known a few. I've also known women who went out with them.

Question: They *are* in an incredible position to cuckold a lot of men.

Towne: Yes. They are crude Pygmalsions: They make women pretty. They know what their flaws are, or the women think they do, and they cover them up. And they touch them. For a lot of women—I don't mean just young, attractive women—maybe it's the most tender and intimate contact they have with anybody.

Question: But *Shampoo* doesn't really explore the idea of the hairdresser people think to be gay but isn't.

Towne: *The Country Wife* idea never really developed. As I wrote, I realized there were other concerns. The only echo of it is in the hairdresser's relationship with Jack Warden and in the steam-room scene. It would have been a mistake to construct a movie just repeating that gag. But *Shampoo*, instead, is sort of *Our Town*. It's Grovers Corners 1968, only it's Beverly Hills. I'm genuinely fond of all the characters. I hope this was communicated to the audience.

Question: When did you write *Shampoo*?

Towne: I did an early draft in 1970.

Question: Why the delay?

Towne: Warren and I had some arguments over the script. He wanted to have one strong woman's role for Julie Christie, and I ended up writing two strong woman's roles, or two roughly equivalent woman's roles. His view was that neither role was strong or good. He was very angry about it, and I was very angry about his being angry about it, because I thought the script was really pretty terrific. For a period of about six months we hardly spoke, and the project was put aside for several years. Then he fitfully talked of reviving it and of adding the political element to the film. One of his major contributions, by the way, was to add the election part to the 1970 draft.

Question: He rewrote it?

Towne: He restructured some of the script and added the party sequences. Then in about eight days at the Beverly Wilshire I completely rewrote it with him and Hal Ashby. We'd argue about certain scenes, especially as time became an important factor. Warren is the kind of person who, once he makes up his mind to do something, after procrastinating seemingly forever, is hysterically com-

mitted to it. He's like a sergeant blowing his whistle and going over the top and leading the troops into the machine guns.

Question: The ending of *Shampoo* raises some questions. You leave Warren Beatty bereft. He's lost the only woman he might have loved. Do you see a tragedy there?

Towne: No.

Question: Do you see the movie as a comedy?

Towne: I see it as a comedy in the sense that nobody dies.

Question: What is behind the moment in the party scene when Julie Christie goes under the table?

Towne: At this point—probably \$30 million of film rental.

Question: It's a large success, isn't it?

Towne: I'm told it's the biggest financial success Columbia Pictures has ever had.

Question: How did you get started writing for films?

Towne: I started writing professionally when I was in Jeff Corey's acting class. It was a peculiar class at that time because there were not only actors there. There were directors, producers, and writers. Among others there was Roger Corman. One day he said, "Kid, how'd you like to write a movie?" I said, "Fine." Roger would let anybody do anything no matter how bad you did it. Everyone I know, Jack Nicholson, Francis Coppola, I mean everybody, got started with Roger.

Question: Was anything particularly helpful to you in learning the craft?

Towne: Yes. Seeing something done exactly the way it was written. It might not necessarily be good, but it was a great lesson either way. One of the hardest things about working in television was that everything got changed so much. You could never tell when something was bad, if it was you or if it was the fact that it had been changed. On *Bonnie and Clyde*, no matter how many times I was forced to rewrite, finally when it was agreed upon, it was shot exactly that way. I was able to gauge what I thought it would play like and then see what it actually played like in dailies. That was of immeasurable value to me.

Question: Is it the concept or the characters you begin with when you're thinking about a screenplay?

Towne: I don't know. You just start fishing around. In the case of *Chinatown*, two things really trig-

gered it. In 1969, there was an article in *West* magazine, which is now defunct, called "Chandler's L.A." There were photographs of Los Angeles, taken today, but showing locations as they existed then. I said, "Jesus, you could really shoot the city as it existed thirty-five years ago." The other was my memory of how certain other sections used to look, and I was very sad about many of the changes—and angry in some cases.

Question: Do you work on a day-to-day schedule?

Towne: I'm very undisciplined. I'm either working or I'm not working. I'm not somebody who is able to work three or four hours at a time, and then get up and go about my business. I couldn't do it. I have to get to the point where it's a matter of sheer desperation that something be finished, and then I work until I can't work any more, stop working, and then go back at it.

Question: Do you organize a first draft or do you just wing it until you've got something on paper?

Towne: You can't wing it. In the case of *Chinatown*, I was constantly trying to organize it. I wrote at least twenty different step outlines—long, long step outlines. Usually I have a pretty clear idea of where the screenplay is going, even if I don't know every step of the way.

Question: Do you divide your step outline into three acts? Do you try to write a well-made play?

Towne: No. I try to see that it goes *somewhere*. I believe in soft openings for movies, anyway, which tends to throw out any conventional one-two-three arrangement.

Question: Why do you have a preference for soft openings for your movies?

Towne: I think it's almost impossible to lose an audience in the first ten minutes, but almost inevitable in the last if you haven't laid the groundwork of the film at the beginning. It's not television. You don't have to grab them. In a movie with a very fast opening, you end up paying for it somewhere along the way—usually by having to explain what happened in the fast and furious action. I almost like it when a movie's a little boring in the beginning because it establishes a kind of credibility that you can build on. It's a ballast if you're going to do more

Vincent Price, in The Tomb of Ligeia, a Roger Corman film which won Robert Towne his first screen credit.





and more implausible things and lead an audience down the garden path.

Question: When you're writing, do you think of the audience—for example, in the tensions you're setting up?

Towne: What I think of most when I think of the audience is, "Will they understand this?" Tensions? What I try to deal with is what amuses, frightens me. The idea of a knife up the nose I found very scary. I didn't think, "This will scare the audience." It was something that would bother me.

Question: Are the production problems in your mind as you're working?

Towne: The closer you get to production the more they are in the front of your mind. Also, things change a lot when you're rewriting and when the actors are suddenly there. It's unpredictable what happens then because the script is no longer fiction. No matter how hard you worked in isolation, suddenly you're dealing with real people, the actors, who are liable to know moment to moment what their characters are going to do, what they're going to be like, better than you. They'll also know it's going to be their faces up there, and they don't want to look like schmucks. They're going to know better than anyone if there's something awkward or inconsistent.

Robert Towne rewrote the screenplay for The Yakuza, a bizarre tale about Japanese Mafia types. In this case, he shared the screenplay credit.

Question: Is there anything you haven't done because you thought it was too controversial to get made?

Towne: No.

Question: Are you interested in writing for another medium besides film? For example, the stage?

Towne: No, definitely not plays. I've written for television, and I hated it. It was useless to me and somewhat detrimental. Which is not to say it couldn't be very good, but it was bad for me.

Question: What was so bad?

Towne: The restrictions in television at the time I was writing were enormous. There was no MTM, no Lear and Yorkin around to do the things they do so well.

Question: We've talked about the need for clarity in a screenplay. But *Chinatown* itself is, for many

people, a demanding film with a complicated plot. Do you agree?

Towne: Maybe the story *is* too complex, I don't know. It's the kind of movie, for example, that should never be seen in a drive-in. You've got to watch everything. I think the movie's right on the edge in terms of its plot complexity. Some people say they can follow it, other people say they had difficulty with it. But I do think it's as lucid an exposition of that kind of convoluted story as you're going to get. Now whether the story is too complicated to be told is another question.

Question: A couple of scenes were cut which might have made the film a little clearer. Why were they dropped?

Towne: A couple of scenes which were cut did have information that would've made the movie clearer. But you have to deal with the rhythms of the movie; and the rhythms of the movie, everybody felt, worked better the way it was, without the scenes.

Question: And there was a scene I understand underwent considerable change—the scene with Jack Nicholson and Faye Dunaway in bed together.

Towne: My least favorite in the film. As written initially, it was just the opposite of what was filmed. Originally, Evelyn was very disturbed by the sex and didn't lie back and say, "Gee, tell me about yourself." She was extremely upset and was actually out of bed, smoking. And Gittes was upset because he had just made love with her, and she was rejecting him. I think the original line was, "Mrs. Mulwray, I hope it was something I said." Frankly, I would have preferred that—she was disturbed by the sex, and she still embodied a mystery—rather than to have her compliment Gittes for making love to her. I thought it was important to continue the mystery of the woman as he was getting more and more fascinated with her and was falling in love.

Question: Why was it changed?

Towne: Roman just didn't like it that way. I think, perhaps, he preferred identifying with the character when the woman praised him for making love well. I don't know—I'm only conjecturing.

Question: In the same scene, are his lines about once trying to save a woman in Chinatown your lines?

Towne: Roman and I had a big argument about it. I don't know whether Roman was right or not. Initially, I was more specific about the story in Chinatown. I wanted what had happened to him to be ridiculous—a humiliation—and instead Roman wanted to emphasize the tragedy, but he didn't want to be specific about it. I wanted him to go to

pains to avoid another humiliation and then have it repeat itself, not foolishly, but tragically, sadly. Roman wanted the tragedy repeated—a tragedy and then a tragedy.

Question: When you had these standoffs with Polanski, did he always win? Did Robert Evans mediate?

Towne: There were certain battles where I had a limited amount of success, but basically Roman would get his way. Bob Evans's position—he is right in this—is that you take Roman as he is, or you fire him. Roman's strength is that he is what he is, and it's also his weakness, because someone like this can be terribly rigid and subject to ossification.

Question: Are you at work on a new screenplay?

Towne: I'm doing an adaptation from *Tarzan of the Apes*—Burroughs's original—about a year-old child whose parents are killed after having been marooned, and who is then raised by an ape.

Question: Hollywood never did that?

Towne: Oh, no. They've never done it, though in the Elmo Lincoln version there's a vague suggestion of it. However, what we know now about animal behavior is much greater than what Burroughs knew. Scientists like Jane Goodall and others have spent years in the wild observing troops of baboons, gorillas, and chimpanzees. We know enough so that I feel it's possible to make a story plausible about a child who is raised by an animal. Among other things, you might have a human being who doesn't consider himself fundamentally different from other forms of life. The life of an ape would be no less valuable to him than the life of a human being. I think there's something to be said for this point of view.

Question: Is this a project you started yourself?

Towne: Yes. I have a friend, Stan Canter, who is close to the lawyer for the Burroughs estate and, after we talked about it, he secured an option from the estate, and we eventually got Warner Bros. to back us.

Question: Have you gone as far as visualizing someone to play the role?

Towne: No. He probably should be an actor and not an athlete turned actor. It's not important that the character be insanely bulky or heavily muscled. After all, animals are not overweight or oversized in the wild.

Question: Is Jane in the story?

Towne: No. The major love story in this screenplay is that of mother and son; a baby's love for its foster

mother, who is an ape. If you can make *that* credible, it's enough.

Question: What's the attitude of the industry toward screenwriters? Any change lately?

Towne: I can only speak for myself, but I feel I'm respected and listened to, at this point. I'm included in the process of the making of the movie, but I ask to be included. It can be as much the fault of writers as it is of insecure directors that writers are not on the set. Some screenwriters are not willing to submit themselves or their work to the exacerbating day-by-day process of the making of a movie. It's humiliating. Each moment committed to paper must be challenged. The screenplay is just a blueprint. It's a fantasy. No matter how good a script is, it's going to be rewritten. In this, movies are unlike plays. In a play you rehearse, and then you perform. As you shoot a movie, it's a combination of rehearsal and performance.

Question: Are you aware when you're writing of the combination?

Towne: Yes. A movie is not quite performance level, and it's not quite rehearsal level. It's a never-never land you're in, and because of the peculiar financial and temporal demands of moviemaking, it's necessary that you rework, improvise, take what the actors give you on a moment-to-moment basis and exploit it. The great directors are exploiters. The great director is a person who can see what's going on at the time and can capitalize on it. And he needs all the help he can get. Whether it comes from a writer or a grip.

Question: In this sense then, a playwright can be the sole author of a play, but the screenwriter can't really be the sole author of a movie?

Towne: Nobody can be the sole author of a movie. Not even the director. Ideally a movie should be one man's vision or it should be a mutually agreed upon vision which everyone helps to achieve. The execution is what to quarrel over. The only thing important is that somebody cares enough to see it steadily and whole, as they used to say about life.

Question: Let's take a Truffaut, who is in control as the director, producer, writer.

Towne: I've never really talked with Truffaut, but I'd be willing to bet that he would not have written *Stolen Kisses*, he would not have written *The 400 Blows*, he would not have written some of his movies in the way he wrote them unless he knew that Jean-Pierre Léaud was alive and walking around. Léaud was his collaborator whether the actor knew at the moment or not. Really good actors are your collaborators.

Question: As Hollywood rates power, knowing

people like Warren and Jack Nicholson gives you a certain amount of power in getting something made, doesn't it?

Towne: No. Commercial success is what gives you power. Everybody meets everybody, but part of the reason you continue to know people is because you've worked with them, and it's gone well. Your friends almost inevitably become the people with whom you work. When you're young, you can be friendly with a lot of people in different professions. As you get older, it gets harder and harder because you get more and more focused. Even my contacts with my close friends now come down to business discussions. I sometimes think I won't be friends with my friends, as it would be good to be, until we get old.

Question: Did you work on the set of *Chinatown* and to what degree were you involved in the actual production after finishing your final draft?

Towne: I was with *Chinatown* until about a week before shooting started, and then I was given to understand I would not be welcome on the set, which was I think, under the circumstances, wise of Roman. At that time Roman and I would have had a hard time agreeing on the color of Faye's nail polish. But I followed it with the daily rushes, and then I was with the post-production. On *Shampoo*, I was never off the set. But I have an unusual relationship with both Hal Ashby and Warren Beatty. They'd actually have me crouching under the camera—it's difficult for some people to allow that. I once worked for a week and a half with Philippe de Broca who directed *The Joker*, *King of Hearts*, and *That Man From Rio*. We were working on a pirate movie. He was more fun to work with than anybody I'd worked with before—stimulating, exciting. He really had what is called Gallic charm. I remember coming up with an idea, and he said, "Oh, Bobby, that is just great, but you must allow me to think I thought of it myself."

Directing is the hardest work in the world. Some directors can't abide the sight of someone who might be involved at a very elemental level in the creation of something. Others are much more mature or shrewd about it and invite collaboration and exploit it. Francis Coppola, for example, is wonderful in his ability to have his own vision and at the same time, be malleable and take from other people. You never feel he doesn't have any idea of what he wants, yet he's very much able to take from other people who have something to offer. But there are others who are so threatened by ideas or suggestions that they tend to want to shut them off. It's one of the reasons why it's valuable to have very close relations with the people you work with. Any conflict which comes up is not necessarily viewed as disrespect or as questioning of the other's talent. You're people who care about each other and who are going for a common goal. It's really good to work with your friends. ■



Alan Agulnick, age eleven,
sets up a shot for
"The Astronaut That
Didn't Quite Make It."

The Yellow Ball Workshop

Or, "The Amazing Colossal Man"
and Other Animations

Patrick McGilligan

Some of the best, most imaginative, most direct, and most vivid animation in this country is being created in an unassuming split-level home in Lexington, Massachusetts, by children. The Yellow Ball Workshop, founded almost by accident thirteen years ago, is becoming increasingly known throughout the world for pioneering in children's animation, and for the incandescent quality of its award-winning short films.

Yvonne Andersen, director of Yellow Ball, and Dominic Falcone, a poet, the co-director, and her husband, sat in their Lexington kitchen one balmy day this autumn, and talked about the idea that became their lives. She has tawny, pixieish hair and a very gracious manner; he is stocky and warm, with a quietly serious air. Their kitchen is also part of The Yellow Ball Workshop, adjacent to an editing

room, a projection and camera room, and a small office, littered with toys, figurines, drawings, pinned-up reminders, and rows of labeled movie reels. It is their home and workshop, because Yellow Ball is still a family matter, even though its animated films are now seen regularly all over the world.

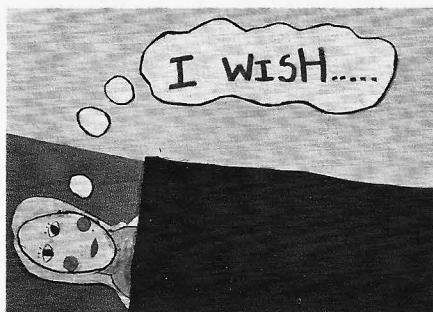
Federico Fellini is rumored to own a favorite print. Yellow Ball films are screened annually at international film festivals, and have won about a hundred awards to date. They are in the collections of libraries and universities. They're shown on television often, on such programs as Saturday morning's "Hot Dog," "Zoom," "Today," "Camera Three," "CBS News," "The Mike Douglas Show," and soon on an upcoming NBC-TV special called "Children of Divorce." Five one-minute public service spots,

created by Yellow Ball students on the subjects of nutrition and consumerism, are shown continually on eighty TV stations across the country. The United States Information Agency distributes them to foreign lands. Yellow Ball cartoons have appeared on television and at film exhibitions in England, Holland, Germany, Iraq, France, Australia, and Japan.

"Japan?" Dominic Falcone scratched his head quizzically. It's sometimes difficult to keep track of Yellow Ball's bounding progress.

"Well," shrugged Yvonne, "I'm not sure what they did in Japan, but they sent us little plaques and gifts."

The Yellow Ball Workshop actually found seed as the Sun Gallery many years ago in Provincetown, where Yvonne and Dominic lived, taught art classes, and ran a small art gallery. They especially liked children's art,



From "I Wish" by Faith Michaels, age thirteen.



From "Stanley the Pink Unicorn" by Amy Kravitz, age thirteen.

and occasionally they exhibited their favorite works. When they moved to Everett, Massachusetts, about thirteen years ago, Yvonne bought some secondhand filmmaking equipment and began to experiment. She soon found herself the darling of the neighborhood, as dozens of curious, enthusiastic youngsters followed her and her camera around.

Yvonne and Dominic started an animation course for children, supplementing their customary art courses and borrowing the sunny name from their old gallery. One thing led to another, and The Yellow Ball Workshop began. "As far as we knew," Yvonne explained, "we were the first people in the United States to offer a 16mm film animation course for children. There were other people who worked in live-action, but we were it for animation. I didn't know that when we started."

Out of this first course grew a group-made horror film, "The Amazing Colossal Man," perhaps the first 16mm animated film by children in this country, an item that is still popular on the Yellow Ball list.

Yvonne and Dominic have a vested interest in children, two of their own, Paul and Jean. Paul, now fourteen won a gold plaque at the Tenth Chicago International Film Festival last year for his science fiction, live action/animated film, "The Cosmic Crystal," starring Yellow Ball children. But their real motive is, simply, a passion for children's art.

"I like to be surprised," explained Yvonne, with a smile, "I go over and look at somebody's artwork, and it's totally unexpected. It's marvelous. Sometimes, with small children, it has this irrational quality. You don't see those emotions or situations expressed

anywhere else. They do funny things when they are animating, stuff you would never expect them to do. I like the quality of the bizarre and the unexpected, and also of the immediate—frequently, it's very immediate stuff."

She herself is entirely self-taught, although she has a Fine Arts degree from Louisiana State University. But she has learned animation well, and has written two books on the subject, *Make Your Own Animated Movies* and *Teaching Film Animation to Children*, besides writing a regular animation column for *Super-8 Filmmaker*, since founding The Yellow Ball Workshop. Over the years, she estimates, she has personally instructed three thousand children, and traveling around, lectured to another ten thousand people. Her influence on the state of the art, especially the children's art, cannot be exaggerated. Her former students ("former children" as she calls them) teach similar workshops around the country, and thus Yellow Ball has directly influenced the boom in elementary and secondary school filmmaking in the United States. Grant-sponsored Yellow Ball programs have been conducted in public schools in Omaha, Anchorage, Little Rock, Greenville, St. Thomas, St. Croix, San Francisco, and Cambridge. And, four times yearly, Yellow Ball hosts an intensive, three-day workshop for teachers, librarians, and others, in which the participants learn to teach children's animation by actually making "a whole 8mm or 16mm film, using cutout techniques and a separate, quarter-inch soundtrack synchronized with the picture."

But the main activity of Yellow Ball, as ever, are its classes for children, who are taught all the various elements of animation—art, story, camera work, editing, animation, sound, and "how to combine these into a single artistic unit." The techniques, as with animation in general, vary, including drawing on film, flip-cards, cutouts, papier-mâché characters and sets, clay animation, and cell animation.

There are four levels of classes—beginning and intermediate Super-8, intermediate 16mm and live-action 16mm, and a special course on the optical printer. The equipment is standard, and includes 16mm Bolex reflex movie cameras and projectors, plus the optical printer for special effects

Part-time Yellow Ball faculty members Paul Falcone and Amy Kravitz at work on their animated rock and roll short, "Sheer Intensity."



(wipes, dissolves, freeze frames, etc.).

The students used to come from the neighborhoods and suburbs, but nowadays they come from far and wide for the small, exhaustive weekend classes. Most of them are under eighteen; and although a four-year-old or two has been known to sneak in, quietly cutting and splicing away, beginners today tend to be eight.

"I'm leaning more towards eight these days," said Yvonne. "It's easier," she laughed. "The younger ones do really good artwork, but they have difficulty with the technology. We used to have them as young as five, the youngest this year is eight. Anyone can take the Super-8 course and do well in it. But the intermediate Super-8 requires a certain amount of dexterity to work with the machines. Many children who are very good artists need to take a year off before they feel comfortable with the dials and switches." She paused. "If a parent calls me, I always ask two questions. Do they enjoy painting and drawing, and do they have long periods of concentration? My classes go four hours a day. If they have a six-year-old who they think is a fanatic and capable of enjoying that situation without fidgeting, he can come. The parent always knows."

It's not unusual for children to be working alongside adults at The Yellow Ball Workshop, or hand-in-hand on the same group project, because Yvonne and Dominic are nothing if not flexible. "We have had grown-ups who come to the children's classes, because they are so anxious to learn," remarked Yvonne. "We have one now who wants to get in. We may even let her come. She says she's not proud. It doesn't matter to us." She laughed. "We even had little children once who came to classes with their mother. They did fine. They finished their films a little earlier than their mother. She was still struggling. They went outside to play." She continued. "We've always known that younger children make films faster. Some of them tighten up a little bit, it's true, as they get older. They get fussier."

"Maybe," suggested Dominic, "they get more disciplined, but less instinctive about what they're doing."

"They're trying to get better and better," agreed Yvonne. "They're trying new techniques."

The workshop is conducted on a shoestring budget, supported by

grants, and fees and monies accrued from the sale or loan of Yellow Ball cartoons. "One of the things that The Yellow Ball Workshop has a reputation for," Yvonne said wryly, "is how to do something simply, easily, and inexpensively, yet create a very good effect."

The only outstanding grant, from the National Endowment for the Arts via the Center for Understanding Media in New York, has long since dried up. "I'm not a grant-getter," she sighed. "I wish I was. I wish I had that kind of temperament." And Yellow Ball cartoons are not shown theatrically. They are screened every weekend at an intimate coffeehouse in Cambridge called "Off the Wall" (where reels of short, usually one-minute, cartoons called "Yellow Ball Caches" have been attracting growing devotees among children and parents).

One of the future concerns of The Yellow Ball Workshop is money, and more money. Yvonne would like to upgrade the equipment, some of it in bad repair, and to allow herself time to experiment with special effects, so that she can teach future classes of children something she herself does not yet know. Two lengthier-than-usual Yellow Ball group films are in the works: "Project Catalyst," a commissioned live-action documentary about an interracial group of children and the arts in Boston; and an animated feature on Dominic Falcone's poems. Both are somewhat stalled for lack of time and money, among other things, but Yellow Ball has no thoughts of going commercial to pull through.

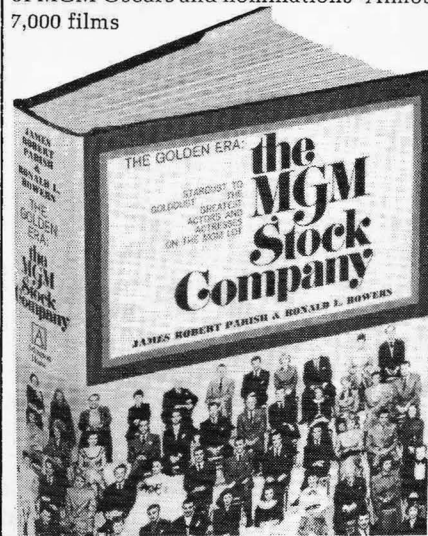
"People say to us, 'Why don't you start lots of little Yellow Ball Workshops all around the country?'" mused Yvonne. "We wouldn't do that, because the quality of what we do is very important to us. I wouldn't want it so big that the quality of what we do gets out of hand. And I want to have time to make films myself. You know, sometimes we are very busy here, sometimes we have less to do. But we are happy. The main thing we would like coming in is money. I have to spend a lot of time now doing projects for money which I would really rather not do." Dominic, gazing out the kitchen window to the wooded hills beyond, only nodded thoughtfully. ★

Patrick McGilligan writes for *The Boston Globe*.

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THE GLORY THAT WAS HOLLYWOOD

The Babylon of the West Is Being Revisited by Every Filmmaker in Town. Why?

Joseph McBride

"I come all the way
out here and what
happens? The
place goes crazy."

— Jeff Bridges in
*Hearts of the
West*

Ken Russell came to Hollywood last summer, greeted with a flurry of kettledrum salvos, flutes, and frenetic belly dancing. Wearing a 1920s vintage white linen suit and carrying a walking stick, the portly British director seated himself on a pile of cushions, watching bemusedly as party guests at a United Artists bash wolfed down exotic hors d'oeuvres served by embarrassed waiters in Arabian garb. The camp event was staged to ballyhoo Russell's first American film, *Valentino*, one of more than forty film and TV projects underway in the current onslaught of films about Hollywood. Noting that it was his first visit to Hollywood, Russell admitted he was "overwhelmed" by the town, figured *Valentino* must have felt the same way, and said he plans to capture that feeling on film.

The director's long discourse with reporters about the enigmas of *Valentino*'s love life left little doubt that his film will be a cinematic equivalent of Kenneth Anger's lurid *Hollywood Babylon*.

Although several films about Hollywood have, over the years, been major hits, and a few have actually been great films (*Singin' in the Rain*, the George Cukor version of *A Star Is Born*, *Sullivan's Travels*, *Sunset Boulevard*), the field is ripe with artistic and commercial failures, and it is doubtful whether the general public has any deep or enduring interest in the subject as screen material, certainly nowhere near the interest it once had in backstage stories of the theater, for instance.



Singin' in the Rain may thrill every film buff with its thorough documentation of Hollywood at the coming of sound, but the film's success with the public undoubtedly came from the fact that it is, first and foremost, a fine musical. *A Star Is Born* and *Sunset Boulevard*, though similarly fascinating in their portrayal of Hollywood, have probably exerted their primary audience appeal because of their powerful characterizations, which could have stemmed from a setting in theater, music, or any other glamorous cultural backdrop; and it wouldn't take radical restructuring to make the hero of *Sullivan's Travels* a novelist instead of a movie director.

Allan Dwan, the pioneer director who is serving as technical advisor on Peter Bogdanovich's early Hollywood saga *Nickelodeon*, says that if he were given a good Hollywood story to direct, he would keep the characters and plot but change the milieu. The conventional Hollywood viewpoint has long held that stories about Hollywood are commercially dangerous, yet producer Irwin Winkler, who is making both *Valentino* and *Nickelodeon* with partner Robert Chartoff (they also have a Busby Berkeley biographical film in the works, being written by Betty Comden and Adolph Green), hopefully asserts that the caveat is "a truism that just isn't true." Most Hollywood observers today, however, are shaking their heads at the upcoming onslaught of Hollywoodiana, questioning whether the public appetite for such fare won't be quickly



Hollywood on Hollywood: Gloria Swanson, as a faded movie queen, gets a polite "no" from C. B. DeMille in Sunset Boulevard.

satiated, whatever the quality of individual projects.

François Truffaut opened the floodgates in 1973 with *Day for Night*, an affectionate insider's chronicle about the making of a film. The most thorough documentation of the filmmaking process yet put on the screen in a fictional context, Truffaut's was essentially a film for connoisseurs, with a limited appeal for the general public. Visiting Hollywood recently, Truffaut was amazed at the number of similar projects in the works, commenting, "I was ahead of the times—for once in my life." But he sensed the trend was coming, and tried to hurry his film through production for that reason. Orson Welles began his John Huston-Peter Bogdanovich film about Hollywood, *The Other Side of the Wind*, in 1970, and he also felt the deluge was imminent. "I want to get it out quickly," he said in 1971, "because I don't think the interest in directors will last very long." Four years later, his film is still in progress, and the interest in it has mounted to suspense; but, as the producer of another imminent Hollywood project confided, "I'm worried, because the people making these films are all film buffs! It's great fun for us, but I wonder who else will care."

Nevertheless, fascination with the subject was demonstrated last spring by two retrospective series in Los Angeles, "Hollywood on Hollywood" on the University of California at Los Angeles campus and "Going Hollywood" at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. *Singin' in the*

Rain was unavailable to the museum because it has been reissued theatrically (to generally disappointing results), but the series revived such less-remembered items as the delightful Jean Harlow comedy *Bombshell*, in which Harlow goodnaturedly sends up her own public image; *What Price Hollywood*, David O. Selznick and George Cukor's "rough draft" for *A Star Is Born*, surpassing any pre-*Day for Night* film in the accuracy of its onset detail; and Paul Mazursky's *Alex in Wonderland*, an erratic but often cogent satire of the new Hollywood, several years ahead of its time. Many of the older films had common themes and characters (the neurotic star, the jaded writer, the paternalistic studio boss, the callous press agent), and few seemed to show much interest in the nuts and bolts of filmmaking, probably because the creators felt the public didn't want its illusions dispelled, and couldn't care less about the machinery behind the illusion.

On the evidence of such early entries in the cycle as *The Day of the Locust* and *The Wild Party*, the new films may seem to manifest a more jaundiced view of Hollywood than did their predecessors, but the first sampling may be misleading. Many other projects have a distinctly nostalgic tone, even when they deal with fringe characters in Hollywood, losers and outcasts, rather than with the glamorous demigods featured in the earlier films. *Hearts of the West*, an amiable Jeff Bridges comedy about Gower Gulch filmmaking in the 1930s, gives the impression that even the seedy assembly line side of yesterday's Hollywood was full of fun and adventure, without the weary cynicism many filmmakers feel today in fighting to get their films financed. The Bridges character has the indefatigable optimism of a Horatio Alger hero, and the film's tone, while highly ironic, never implies that the young man's exuberance is entirely misplaced. Similarly, *The First Nudie Musical*, a low-budget Paramount Pictures comedy about the porno business, basically takes the plot of an old Dick Powell-Ruby Keeler backstage musical and transplants it without a blush in a squalid contemporary setting. The film is aptly described by co-director Mark Haggard as "a sleazy *Singin' in the Rain*."

Public response to the vituperative *Locust* has been tepid, despite its glossy production values, and *The Wild Party*, a turgid and dispirited film based on the Fatty Arbuckle scandal, was an outright bomb. From an audience point of view, running down Hollywood so cynically is extremely dangerous, for the public still looks to Hollywood for its role models, and the star system is at a particularly high point of ascendancy today. Dwan says he is convinced that movies about Hollywood have to be "fairy tales" to succeed, because audiences don't like to be told their fantasy world is a complete sham. Though his theory is perhaps too exclusive, it does apply to the best films of this type. As A. D. Murphy pointed out in his review of *Day of the Locust*, the classic films about Hollywood generally dealt not with the miserable lives of

venal characters but with “the ascent over time of some admired personalities, or (less nobly) the decline of a former object of worship.” Even the penchant for scandal and exposé shared by such films as *The Barefoot Contessa*, *The Bad and the Beautiful*, *Sunset Boulevard*, and the various versions of *A Star Is Born* did not blunt the excitement involved in watching the tragic sagas of characters living impossibly romantic lives. Today’s filmmakers, having passed through the down-with-Hollywood attitude fashionable in the 1960s into an envious longing for old-time Hollywood’s energy and exuberance, are faced with the problem of creating believable fables for skeptical modern audiences without denying the still-potent, romantic lure of Hollywood.

Other inconclusive evidence has come recently from *The Way We Were*, a highly popular film which dealt only in part with Hollywood (the blacklist era), and *The Great Waldo Pepper*, another Robert Redford film ending up in Hollywood (stunt flying in the early 1930s) to demonstrate the hollowness of the American Dream. A couple of marginal items haven’t much to tell us about the trend: *Gosh!* a forgettable cheapie about the making of sex films, and two star documentaries, Richard Patterson’s *The Gentleman Tramp* (about Charles Chaplin) and Ray Connolly’s *James Dean*, *The First American Teenager*. Television has contributed *The Sex Symbol*, with Connie Stevens playing a Marilyn Monroe figure; *The Legend of Valen-*

tino, with Franco Nero as the sheik, directed by Melville Shavelson; *The Black Dahlia*, about the notorious 1940s murder of an aspiring starlet; and *Fear on Trial*, another treatment of the blacklist, dealing with its effect on broadcasting (the John Henry Faulk case).

Los Angeles settings have played a major part in the appeal of four recent hits; but, significantly perhaps, none deals directly with filmmaking: *Shampoo*, *Lenny*, *Chinatown*, and *Aloha, Bobby and Rose*. The latter, a flimsy love story, became an unexpected smash, drawing the crowds Columbia Pictures had expected from the more prestigious *The Fortune*, which is set in Los Angeles of the 1920s but has a cast of characters as petty and odious as those in *Day of the Locust*. It isn’t just glamour or nostalgia that these films draw on; it’s the old American notion that California, and specifically Hollywood, is El Dorado, the place where dreams come true, quick millions can be found, and anyone can become a star. Mazursky, one of the sharpest observers of the California scene, is working on a new screenplay which he describes as dealing with “the miracle aspect” of Los Angeles—“everybody who comes here thinks a miracle will happen.” When the new films about Los Angeles or Hollywood debunk the American Dream, they still show a deep fascination with the trappings of wealth and power; what better example than *Day of the Locust*, which turned Nathanael West’s slim satire of Hollywood decadence into a bloated \$8 million film dripping with lavish art design and fancy salon photography?

Two crucial test cases upcoming for the cycle include Universal’s *Gable and Lombard* and *W. C. Fields and Me*. *Gable and Lombard* is being touted as an old-fashioned glamorous love story (Lombard’s salty language has, contrary to prevalent practice, been cleaned up), and that would seem to have popular appeal were it not for the fact that the



In *A Star Is Born* (1954), James Mason tries to upstage Judy Garland as she receives her Academy Award.

Won-Ton-Ton, The Dog That Saved Hollywood is a thinly disguised satire on the life and times of Rin-Tin-Tin.



almost unknown James Brolin is playing Gable. Indeed, impressions of familiar stars, even by accomplished actors, have seldom worked on screen. *W. C. Fields and Me*, the story of the classic comedian's romance with Carlotta Monti, has some built-in interest because of the young audience's fondness for Fields, but again it's questionable whether Rod Steiger can suspend disbelief in the central role, and also whether the fans of Fields's comedy will be interested in discovering what made him such a misanthropic character. A powerful film which treated the same subject several years ago, Carl Reiner's *The Comic*, gained no acceptance whatsoever, perhaps because the title gave the impression it would be a funny movie.

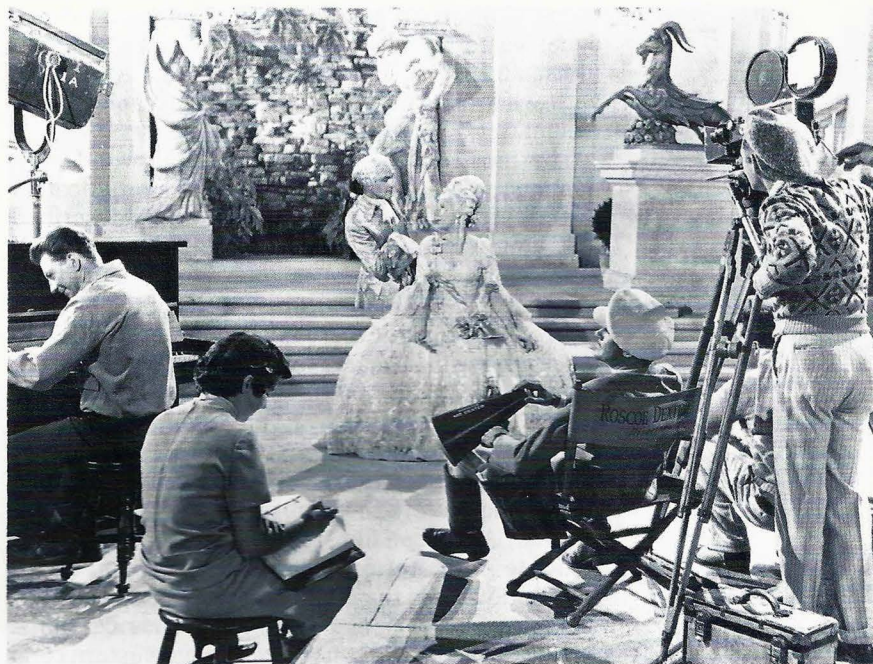
Paramount's film of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon*, now in production, is on much firmer ground, due to the strength of the story and the imposing teaming of Elia Kazan as director, Harold Pinter as scriptwriter, and Sam Spiegel as producer. The cast is also impressive, including Robert De Niro as Monroe Stahr (the Irving Thalberg character), Robert Mitchum as the studio boss,

Jack Nicholson as a radical organizer, and Jeanne Moreau as a Garbo-like actress. Other Hollywood projects in production or nearing release include: *Inserts* (Richard Dreyfuss as a porno director), *Won Ton Ton, The Dog That Saved Hollywood* (the saga of Rin Tin Tin, with Bruce Dern doing a takeoff on Darryl F. Zanuck), *The Front* (Woody Allen in a blacklist comedy written by Walter Bernstein and directed by Martin Ritt), *Drive-In* (a comedy in the *American Graffiti* mold, directed by Rod Amateau), *The Actresses* (a Roger Corman quickie about sex-and-violence quickies), *Movie Rush* (a Warner Bros. comedy about Italian porno), *Good-bye, Norma Jean* (another Monroe story) and a TV special, "James Dean: Portrait of a Friend," written and produced by William Bast.

Awaiting production are *Nickelodeon*, Bogdanovich's Burt Reynolds-Ryan O'Neal screwball comedy about Hollywood in the primitive days before *The Birth of a Nation*; *The Stuntman*, a contemporary tale with Lamont Johnson directing Reynolds (after he emerges from *Nickelodeon*); film biographies of Errol Flynn, Bruce Lee, and two rival projects on Tom Mix; *Actor*, a television dramatization of Paul Muni's life; *Barrymore*, another TV biography starring Kirk Douglas; Mel Brooks's *The Silent Movie*, a satire which supposedly will be played without dialogue; *Newsreel*, from a Hal Barwood-Matthew Robbins script about a soldier-of-fortune cameraman in the 1930s; and documentaries about stuntmen, animal stars,



Joel McCrea, as a Hollywood director, sets out to learn the realities of Depression life in Sullivan's Travels.



Singin' in the Rain poked fun at Hollywood's period of transition between silence and sound. Gene Kelly and Jean Hagen are the performers in this scene.

and female moviemakers.

Somewhat more peripheral are Mazursky's *Next Stop, Greenwich Village*, about a New York actor leaving for Hollywood; the third (or fourth, counting *What Price Hollywood*) version of *A Star Is Born*, but this one with Barbra Streisand and Kris Kristofferson as rock stars; Robert Altman's *Buffalo Bill and the Indians, or Sitting Bull's History Lesson*, which Altman describes as dealing with "the first movie star"; *Network*, a Paddy Chayefsky comedy about live television in the 1950s, directed by Sidney Lumet; and *Witch Hunt*, Albert Maltz's TV film about the blacklist. Other announced projects include a Billy Wilder-I.A.L. Diamond story which Wilder has tantalizingly called "the *Forsyte Saga* of Hollywood"; *Hubba Hubba*, dealing with Hollywood in the 1940s and written by Robert Benton and David Newman; *The Old Master*, a film about D. W. Griffith, to be played by John Huston, which Richard Patterson is preparing; and *The Forked Tongue Massacre*, a comedy about contemporary Western filmmaking by Cy Howard, who wrote *Won Ton Ton*.

One veteran director sees the trend as a sign of contemporary Hollywood's artistic impotence. "It's desperation, isn't it? They're running out of stories to tell." To a large degree, that's true—rip-off merchants are running rampant in Hollywood today, and there is a disturbing tendency to shy away from offbeat material—but there are some more complex and valid causes for the trend than mere impotence. At the moment, three other traditional Hollywood genres are undergoing a resurgence: westerns, swashbucklers, and science-fiction films; and it's significant that all four types deal with what is usually described as "escapist" subject matter.

The most glaring omission in Hollywood filmmaking today is the film dealing with a provocative topical subject, the kind that used to be described as "ripped from the pages of today's headlines." Television, its techniques much more suited for topicality, has of course taken much of the bite out of such stories, but there is also an obvious reluctance among filmmakers to deal with contemporary realism, because movie audiences supposedly would find it depressing. Even *Shampoo*, a highly incisive study of current sexual mores, was slightly distanced in time (1968), and this was undoubtedly one of the factors in its huge appeal. When times are bad, American films generally try to provide an antidote in the form of glamour, escapism, or adventure; witness the high-society comedies, Busby Berkeley musicals, and derring-do romances of the 1930s, or the heavy concentration on westerns and sci-fi films in the mid-1950s, a period of apathy and paranoia much like today. (And also, not coincidentally, a time when Hollywood was making some of its best films about itself.)

When traditional forms are revived after a period of disuse, artists naturally have to evaluate them critically, discard the elements which no longer appeal to audiences, and retain what is most valid

in the genre from a contemporary viewpoint. Today's sci-fi and monster films, for example, place a greater premium on believability than was demanded by the 1950s audience. Similarly, in the new films about Hollywood, today's audience, more educated in movie history, probably expects to see more about the technical side of filmmaking than earlier audiences would tolerate.

It's important to remember, too, that the trend toward artistic self-examination is not peculiar to film, but is also a major literary theme in this highly self-conscious age. Such writers as Jorge Luis Borges, Vladimir Nabokov, and John Barth have turned the act of storytelling into the central focus of much of their work, and even the most humdrum novelists have become aware of the limitations of the omniscient form. In a recent article in *The New York Times Book Review*, John Gardner commented skeptically:

"What has made the self-conscious novel fashionable is not, I think, its great honesty and wisdom. Even in the best hands, such as Samuel Beckett's, this fiction is pretty paltry stuff intellectually. Its advantage over the more old-fashioned kind of 'realistic' fiction is that it suits our for the most part childishly petulant contemporary mood—our self-congratulating self-doubt.... And it suits, also, a nobler quality in contemporary life: our delight in discovering how things work, our pleasure in seeing objects for themselves, enjoying their colors and textures. In our age, magicians explain their tricks, even print them in magazines, and our admiration soars.... The construction of a novel, once hidden from view like the machinery on a film set, becomes part of the pleasure (like the exposed machinery in a Fellini film)."

Other media are sharing in this eagerness to explain their tricks. In journalism, participatory reporting has become an increasingly tiresome habit, and on television news and talk shows, hardly a minute goes by without someone chatting with the crew or calling attention to a cue card. Self-consciousness, in such cases, becomes a decadent bore, but when properly handled, it can be the impetus for a stimulating give-and-take between reality and the perception of reality. The projects going before movie cameras in the current cycle are bound to produce many more duds than not, but that's the price we've become accustomed to pay for a few worthwhile works of art. If one looks farther into the future, however, a disturbing prospect arises. When filmmakers in the year 2000 make the next cycle of films about Hollywood, what are their subjects going to be? Instead of *Gable and Lombard*, we'll have *Sonny and Cher*; instead of *W. C. Fields and Me*, *Mel Brooks and Me*; and are you ready for *Warren Beatty Slept Here*, *Bruce, The Shark Who Saved Hollywood*, and *Whatever Happened to Tatum O'Neal*? ■

Joseph McBride appears in *The Other Side of the Wind*, *The Wild Party*, and *The Actresses*, playing, in order, a film critic, a party guest, and a rapist.

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The Rise
and
Fall of

ROCK FILM

From *Woodstock* to *Stardust*,
the Parade's Gone By

Thomas Wiener

Until *A Hard Day's Night* and *Help!*, rock movies followed a pattern of sprinkling exploitable rock acts throughout a trite story of show-biz shenanigans or teen love. While some genuinely exciting rock talent had found its way into films, the state of rock music by the early sixties was flagging badly, with the talented innovators being replaced by a bland crew of imitators whose music drifted dangerously toward mainstream pop. The Beatles reversed that drift, and their films, brilliantly directed by Richard Lester, dispensed with a

story line and revealed the Beatles to be individual personalities as well as talented rock and roll performers.

The success of the Beatles' films also inspired a series of films featuring, revue-style, a lineup of British pop stars. While *Go-Go Bigbeat* and *Go Go Mania* (both released in 1965) served to introduce or reacquaint American rock fans with their British favorites, neither had the strong lineup that American International's *The T.A.M.I. Show* (1965) had. All three of these films dispensed with any pretense of a story and concen-

trated on presenting the acts either in a TV studio or in a theater packed with young fans.

The T.A.M.I. Show delivered best. The acts covered nearly all the bases of rock music, and many performers went on to become lasting stars. Filmed in the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium, with surfing music twins Jan and Dean as MCs, the film brought together an old master (Chuck Berry), several Motown acts (the Supremes, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles), Mr. Soul (James Brown), a nice Jewish girl (Lesley

Gore), a hot British group (the Rolling Stones), and the senior citizens of surf music (the Beach Boys). While the photography and direction were functional at best, the performers all seemed to be enjoying themselves as much as the audience.

Quick to capitalize on this new format, in 1966 American International came up with *The Big TNT Show*, this time selecting an even wider variety of music. The popularity of folk music was represented by Joan Baez and Donovan; there was another old master (Bo Diddley), an authentic genius (Ray Charles), and the rock-folk-country groups (the Byrds and the Lovin' Spoonful).

The third of the big rock revue films of the mid-sixties was Murray Lerner's *Festival*, an engaging collection of several years of performances at the Newport Folk Festival. Among the performances was Bob Dylan's 1965 set with the Paul Butterfield Blues Band in which Dylan introduced some of his "electric" material. The audience's reaction in the film was highly audible; boos and angry shouts greeted Dylan's rendition of "Maggie's Farm." It was the first moment in rock movies in which the faithful expressed a negative reaction to the music. The audience, prepared for Dylan's acoustic guitar and folk songs, didn't appreciate the intrusion of rock upon their festival, but Dylan couldn't ignore the power of rock; he was tired of being constrained by the label "folk singer."

Just how tired Dylan could be with labels was brilliantly documented in D. A. Pennebaker's *Don't Look Back* (1967), a record of Dylan's 1965 tour of Great Britain. Whether Dylan's music was rock, folk, or pop, what mattered was that his listeners took it seriously, and no one was more aware of this than Dylan himself. *Don't Look Back* suggested that a rock performer could be troubled by the adulation of his fans, and not just because he feared for his physical safety as he left a concert hall. The tension which surrounded Dylan, who was bombarded with even more inane questions about his music than those which greeted the Beatles (who, after all, only wanted to hold her hand; Dylan was talking about a hard rain falling and masters of war), was palpable in nearly every scene. The pop star, a product of his fans

(here, an obtuse science student and three giggling girls), his manager (a genial and conniving Albert Grossman), and the media (a mystified reporter from *Time*), was now shown as an unwilling captive of all three.

***Gimme Shelter* raised serious questions about the ability of rock music to make everything all right.**

The image of the pop star as a trapped creature surfaced again in Peter Watkins's *Privilege* (1967), a study of a rock singer of the near-future who becomes an unwilling tool of a conspiracy between the Church of England and the government to keep rebellious youth in line. Anticipating the theatricality of rock in the seventies, the film featured Paul Jones (formerly lead singer with the British band, Manfred Mann) singing in manacles in an act meant to stir the hearts and minds of his teenaged audience and to make them more receptive to the government's policies. *Privilege* seemed farfetched and hysterical to some critics, but it did point out the growing influence of rock over a significant segment of England's population.

By the late sixties, changes in rock music were occurring so rapidly that movie exploiters could barely keep pace. The popularity of folk music was a problem for the exploiters. There wasn't fast money in the folk scene, just a lot of peaceful-looking kids sitting around listening to someone protest a war. It took the summer of 1967 to provide the exploiters with all the material they would need for the next few years. It was the "Summer of Love," and San Francisco was the place. The word "hippie" was coined, and the new brand of bohemianism became a source for an endless stream of nonmusical films about flower children, LSD trips, and young runaways.

Down the coast, in Monterey, the annual jazz festival was supplemented by a new pop festival, and D. A. Pennebaker was there to film it. The result, *Monterey Pop*, was another step forward for the rock revue film. By the time the film was released in 1969, the music of all the groups in the film, some of whom were then unknown outside the Bay Area, was well known to all rock

fans, and the film played to enormously enthusiastic audiences.

What Pennebaker captured in *Monterey Pop*, besides some stirring musical performances, was a strong sense of that summer's mood. In the film's opening shot, a girl talks in a childlike voice about the festival, claiming that it was going to be like Christmas, New Year's, and her birthday combined, that vibrations would be flowing. Previous rock revues, filmed in crowded theaters, never articulated audience reactions beyond the standard shots of girls screaming and applauding. The fans at Monterey were different; the atmosphere was different. It was laid-back, mellow, and appreciatively cool, almost like the Newport audiences in *Festival*, but without any looks of intensity. Even when The Who smashed their guitars and set off

Gimme Shelter: The myth of a Woodstock generation was shattered by murder at Altamont Speedway in 1969.



smoke bombs, the Monterey audience seemed too spaced out to even be amazed.

The feeling from *Monterey Pop* itself was indeed one of good vibrations, although in the succeeding years, the film has taken on an undercurrent of sadness. *Monterey Pop* features six young performers who have died since the summer of 1967: Otis Redding, Al Wilson, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Cass Elliott, and Brian Jones, the MC of the festival. Besides setting music in a cultural context, the film's historical importance has been increased by its recording of these performers.

With all the directions which rock movies were taking, by 1970 there was still no single film that tied the whole scene together. In the spring of 1970, Michael Wadleigh's *Woodstock* was released, and the timing couldn't have been better, if only from a commercial standpoint. Publicity surrounding the film had been building since the festival itself, which took place in August, 1969. *Woodstock* was an event which received a tremendous amount of media attention, not just for its outstand-

ing lineup of performers, but for the fulfillment of the "Summer of Love's" promise that music, peace, and love would make it all right. Over a half-million kids together for three days, and there were no serious incidents. "Amazing!" cried the media.

Even more amazing was the movie. Financed by a major studio, Warner Bros., dozens of cameramen shot thousands of feet of film, which the studio at first insisted on cutting to a normal feature length in time for Christmas release. (The exploitative mentality was again at work, figuring that half the groups in the film would be off the charts after Christmas.) Wadleigh's insistence on a longer film prevailed, and *Woodstock* was released in the spring of 1970 with a running time of three hours.

Woodstock was the epic rock film. Performance is intrinsically a part of rock and roll; *Woodstock* recognized this, and presented as wide a variety of performers as possible, although it concentrated on performers with charismatic stage routines such as Joe Cocker, The Who, Sha-Na-Na, Jimi Hendrix, and Richie Havens. Early rock revue films seemed to re-

strict their performers' movements, but *Monterey Pop* showed a few acts like Hendrix and The Who cutting loose, and *Woodstock* seemed to set nearly everyone free. The enormous and enormously good-humored crowd obviously turned-on the performers.

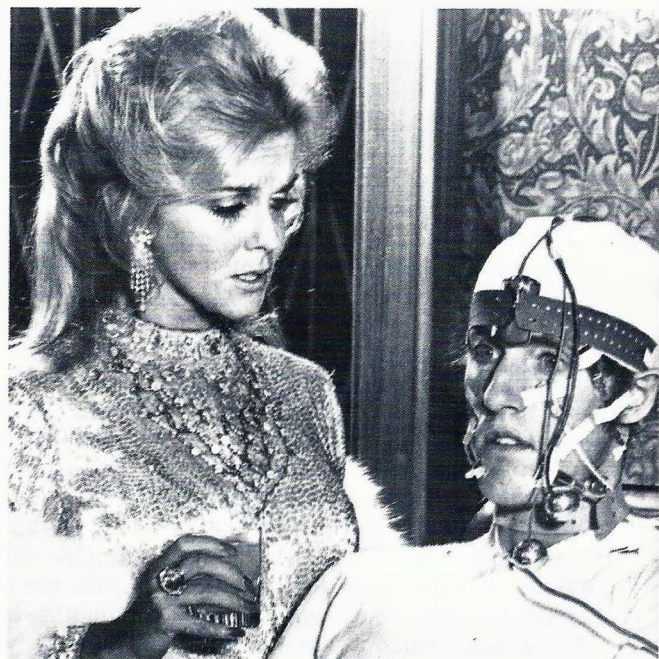
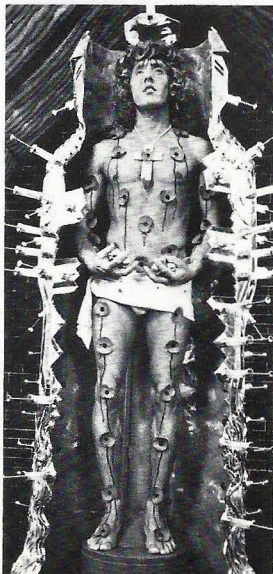
Woodstock was an experience in itself. If you weren't at the festival, you could practically experience it all through the movie. Three hours in a theater seat was no substitute for three days in mud and rain with clogged toilets and half-cooked food, but Wadleigh involved his movie audience as members of the Woodstock nation by interspersing the performances with shots of the audience listening, playing, making love, practicing yoga, swimming, and even breaking down, although negative aspects were kept to a minimum to perpetuate the myth.

Finally, the film was light years in technical expertise beyond any previous rock performance film. The photography was usually in focus, the editing crisp and imaginative. Wadleigh and his editors employed the split screen to involve the theater

Roger Daltrey in Tommy preaching salvation through playing pinball.



Tommy undergoes an LSD treatment which has been administered by the Acid Queen.



Ann-Margret, as Tommy's mother seems concerned over a treatment to cure his basic catatonia.

audience even more closely with the performers, and the effects nearly always worked. In fact, many people who were at the festival went to the movie to see what music they had missed. After all, no one at Woodstock enjoyed the vantage points Wadleigh's camera crew had or heard the quality of the music, remixed by sound technicians, played at high volume over theater stereo speakers. *Woodstock* was a chance for people to relive an event, almost like watching one's self on the 7 p.m. news, marching in a peace demonstration held that very same day.

Woodstock was also rock exploitation at its highest level. Although the festival was planned as the greatest collection of rock stars ever assembled, its promoters did not anticipate the event's huge turnout of people, nor the relative ease with which logistical problems were handled. As later festivals would prove, Woodstock was something of a fluke. But in the spring of 1970, no one could tell that to the long lines of people waiting to see the film, to relive "three days of peace, love, and music."

The Woodstock myth was cruelly shattered by the events at Altamont Speedway in December, 1969, and the good vibrations which peaked with the film *Woodstock* were grounded by the Altamont film, *Gimme Shelter*, released in December, 1970. Like *Woodstock*, *Gimme Shelter* was part calculated exploitation and part accident. In this case, Albert and David Maysles and their associate, Charlotte Zwerin, were filming the Rolling Stones' 1969 American tour, which was to culminate in a free outdoor concert at Altamont. The film, which might have ridden on the euphoric wave created by *Woodstock*, became instead its sobering counterpoint. To the Maysles' and Zwerin's credit, they did not play down the tragic events at Altamont; in fact, they structured the film around them.

Gimme Shelter raised serious questions about the ability of music to make everything all right. One of the film's most poignant moments came during the set by the Jefferson Airplane, when fighting breaks out between the Hell's Angels, hired as security for the Stones, and several people in the crowd. Members of the Airplane, the most popular band that

summer, attempt to calm the crowd with homilies about loving one another, but the crowd seems bewildered. No one seems to be able to stem the madness which is swelling up about the stage. By the time the Stones come on, well after sunset, a real tragedy is inevitable, and an Angel spots a black youth waving what appears to be a gun and stabs him to death. In the Maysles' editing room several months later, Jagger watched the murder. The Maysles ran it over and over for him, but no emotion seemed to register on his face.

"Tommy was touted by Russell as 'the greatest work of art of the twentieth century.'"

And like Jagger, the youthful rock movie fans weren't sure how to react to *Gimme Shelter*. Its distributor claimed the picture was not a financial loss, but was a disappointment in terms of expectations. He cited the kids' unwillingness to confront an event which seemed to deny everything that Woodstock had exemplified. The movie was inconclusive about responsibility for the events at Altamont, but in some ways the real villain was the Woodstock myth, which allowed everyone—the Stones, their business managers, the fans—to blithely skip into a potentially dangerous situation with the idea that music would have charms to soothe even the most savage Angel.

Gimme Shelter was not the only rock movie of 1970 to suggest that not all was well in rock and roll. The Beatles' breakup was documented in Michael Lindsay-Hogg's *Let It Be* (1970), which showed them straining to complete their final album with little of the conviviality which marked the two Lester films. Jagger's portrayal of a reclusive rock star in *Performance* includes the observation that "the only performance is madness itself." And *Groupies* mercilessly exposed the pathetic world of rock sexual hangers-on.

The more personal, country-flavored music of the early seventies, in which the individual performer was more important than the bands of the sixties, was nearly as difficult to exploit as the folk music of the mid-sixties had been. A few films, however, struggled to retain the spirit of

Monterey Pop and *Woodstock*. *Fillmore* was a fine revue film, but its real star was promoter Bill Graham, who was closing his Fillmore theaters because of rising costs, excessive demands by pampered stars, and rowdy behavior by audiences. The film of the Concert for Bangladesh traded in on some big names—Bob Dylan and George Harrison—while claiming to donate a large portion of its grosses to charity. But the concert took place in cavernous and impersonal Madison Square Garden, and the film conveyed no sense of the audience interacting with the performers, who were more sincere than exciting.

The one trend that emerged from these less frenetic days was nostalgia. Rock had at last acquired a sense of its past, and it turned toward what it pictured as the golden early days when the energy level was high and the possibilities for music to change the world seemed limitless. Elvis Presley began making personal appearances again, as documented in two films, *Elvis—That's the Way It Is* (1970) and *Elvis on Tour* (1972), which featured the one-time king of the greasers playing to middle-aged

Monterey Pop features six performers, including Janis Joplin, who have died since the summer of 1967.



audiences in Las Vegas. Jimi Hendrix, one of the sixties most exciting stage performers, was resurrected from his death in 1970 for three films, the best of which was *A Film About Jimi Hendrix*, a modest appraisal of his career. D. A. Pennebaker weighed in with *Keep on Rockin' (Sweet Toronto)*, featuring performances by four of rock's early giants: Chuck Berry, Jerry Lee Lewis, Bo Diddley, and Little Richard.

Ken Russell's *Tommy* did nothing more than prove that a well-promoted movie could make money.

The two most important nostalgia films of the early seventies were *American Graffiti* (1973) and *Let the Good Times Roll* (1973). The latter combined performances from Richard Nader's popular rock and roll revival shows with clips of the performers in rock films and documentary footage from the fifties. The film was packaged as slickly as those TV ads in which Chubby Checker lets you know where to send your \$5.98 for a record of Golden Oldies. Nevertheless, most of the performers showed they could still strut their stuff, including Little Richard, well aware of the camera, cutting up to compensate for all those fifties films in which the director told him to cool his act lest the Legion of Decency condemn the film.

American Graffiti's affectionate look at early sixties small-town America, where "cruising" was the only way for most teens to pass the time, was also an excuse to pack over forty old rock tunes onto a soundtrack, even if some of the songs were not contemporary to the story's time. George Lucas, the director, managed to evoke the simpler times by keeping up a steady stream of oldies, presumably playing on the various car radios, although one had the feeling that the music was more important than the story. *American Graffiti* had some fine comic moments, but eventually strained for too much significance by updating the lives of the four protagonists in a brief epilogue.

The only approach to rock left seemed to be parody. And Brian De Palma took it in *Phantom of the Paradise* (1974), which owes as much of its visual imagery and ideas to old

movies like *Psycho* and *Phantom of the Opera* as to rock and roll. De Palma shrewdly used smarmy Paul Williams as a greedy rock tycoon, but his choice of Williams's music was less fortunate. The music lacked the earthiness and directness of rock; Williams is not a rock composer, and his material seems more suited to a story about two doomed lovers who go to rock and roll heaven than to a horror story.

However, the film's parodies of rock trends—nostalgia, surf music, rock Grand Guignol, and glitter rock—were performed with verve and humor by Gerrit Graham as Beef, the effeminate glitter rocker, and the trio of Harold Obling, Jeffrey Comanor, and Archie Hahn as the Juicy Fruits (nostalgia), the Beach Bums (surf), and the Undead (Grand Guignol). Although Williams's songs in these scenes were only functional, the stage routines were the highlights of the film.

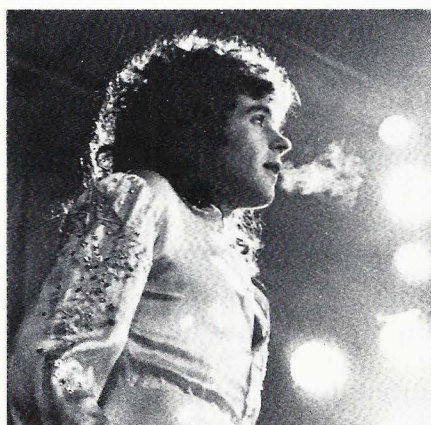
Rock is difficult to parody anyway, because it rarely takes itself seriously. However, with the release in 1967 of the Beatles' album, "Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club

Band," some serious music critics, as well as a new generation of rock critics, began writing weightier dissections of rock music and lyrics. And in 1969, The Who released "Tommy," the cover of which read "Opera by Pete Townshend" (The Who's lead guitarist). Indeed, the songs in the album, mostly sung by the group's Roger Daltrey, told a story of a blind, deaf and dumb pinball wizard turned messiah. The reaction was immediate. Loud hosannas from critics who had been ignoring The Who for years. Big sales. Claims for rock's coming of age. Discussions of Tommy's significance to today's youth searching for new messiahs. And talk of further Tommys.

Inevitably, there was the movie. Ken Russell's *Tommy*, however, did nothing more than prove that a well-promoted rock film could make money in 1975. No more. The concept of *Tommy* was hardly revolutionary. Russell broke no new ground cinematically, except maybe in having actors like Oliver Reed and Jack Nicholson attempt to sing rock. *Tommy's* subject matter is hardly profound, as Townshend himself has

David Essex, a British rock star in his own right, plays rock star Jim Maclaine in Stardust. Top, performing his "rock cantata." Bottom, listening to a playback.

The rock star of Stardust about to meet a premature death from a drug overdose.



admitted. That the rock opera was reportedly touted by Russell as "the greatest work of art the twentieth century has produced," probably had more to do with promoting a movie than comparing the music of Pete Townshend to the painting of Picasso, the writing of Joyce, and even the music of Stravinsky or Elington.

Tommy was conceived and marketed in the same old way. It exploited the rock opera like any movie exploits its best-seller source. It employed several big rock names and actors for marquee value; and its publicity—"Your senses will never be the same"—promised us a return to those thrilling psychedelic days of yesteryear. The film did have its moments, usually the musical numbers by professionals like Elton John and Tina Turner, and one sensational scene with Roger Daltrey as Tommy, leading a revival meeting by singing into a cross-shaped microphone.

If *Tommy* failed as the ultimate in rock movies, another 1975 release proved to be the best dramatic film about rock and roll. *Stardust* was a kind of *Jailhouse Rock* with a downbeat seventies ending. The film begins on the evening of President John F. Kennedy's assassination with British, working-class singer Jim MacLaine meeting old friend Mike Menarry and asking him to manage his band, the Stray Cats. Carried on the tidal wave of popularity British groups achieved during the mid-sixties, the group becomes quite successful, and MacLaine goes on to become a solo star, composing a rock "cantata." Instead of ending the story with MacLaine at the peak of his career, the film depicts his "retirement" to a renovated castle in Spain where he becomes a virtual recluse, unable to write or perform. Finally, on the day of an internationally televised interview at the castle, MacLaine overdoses and dies on the way to a hospital.

Stardust is a well crafted film, with smooth direction by Michael Apted and a script by Ray Connolly which adroitly covers ten years. The sudden metamorphosis of MacLaine and his band from working class rockers to international celebrities is accomplished with believability and a strong feeling for the inner workings

of the music business. In fact, the business of rock is documented here with more detail than any film since *Gimme Shelter*. At one point, Mike, trying to defend Jim's career decisions to MacLaine's American business manager, says, "That's *his* business." The manager snaps back, "Yeah, but it's *our* money." Like Dylan, Jim MacLaine is sometimes portrayed as the captive of business interests, as well as of the hyperbolic media and an adoring public.

The film achieves authenticity in several ways. The cast is carefully selected. MacLaine is played by David Essex, a British pop star in his own right, and Mike is played by Adam Faith, a pop singer in the early sixties turned actor when his singing career faltered. The Stray Cats are all played by British rock musicians, including the irrepressible Keith Moon of The Who. The sound track is littered with rock songs of the sixties; they are heard only in snatches on car radios or jukeboxes so that the music remains an important background element rather than a prominent attempt at nostalgia.

The Beatles and the performers of Woodstock said all we needed was love.

What lifts *Stardust* above all previous dramatic rock films is its awareness of what fuels the rock star and of what may have caused so many premature career failures or deaths among those stars. As Greil Marcus has written, "What links the greatest rock and roll careers is a volcanic ambition; in some cases, a refusal to know when to quit or even rest." As Mike admits of Jim in *Stardust*, "He wanted to be more famous than anyone else; that was a lot of crap about rock and roll." Although Marcus was talking about Elvis, he might have been discussing any number of rock stars whose lives or careers never survived the hectic sixties. Jim MacLaine's consuming ambition left him nothing after he had achieved success. The theme is not limited to the rock scene of the sixties and seventies, and for that reason *Stardust* achieves some distinction as a film about human problems rather than another rip-off of some current trend in rock.

Many of the rock movies of the

early seventies dealt with death in various forms, whether it was Meredith Hunter's stabbing at Altamont, the breakup of the Beatles, the closing of the Fillmores, or Jim MacLaine's overdose. Rock music has always had a morbid fascination with death, and these films of the seventies added the idea that film could instantly record and transmit death. At the end of *Stardust*, photographers and cameramen race Jim MacLaine's ambulance to the hospital, all vying for the best shot of the dying star. One is reminded of Dylan's line from "Desolation Row": "They're selling postcards of the hanging." And of course, the nostalgic films implied that some elements of rock—innocence, energy, and spontaneity—had died with the earliest, crudest, and most direct rock music.

Rock movies raise expectations which are rarely fulfilled. In the fifties, we were promised Chuck Berry and Little Richard, but had to sit through a sappy story of teen love in order to catch one or two numbers by the real stars of the film. The Beatles and the performers of Woodstock said all we needed was love, but *Let It Be* and *Gimme Shelter* forced us to confront the banal world of personality conflicts and shady business dealings, as well as the darker side of human nature. Nostalgia took us back to simpler years, but also reminded us that the present might be too confusing or too threadbare to sustain us.

Rock movies have fallen on hard times not because there isn't music for them, but because producers are uncertain of which trends to exploit. If rock movies are to be revived, it may take a major event similar to the rise of the Beatles to do it, for most filmmakers react only to what is most visible and positive about rock. Although *Stardust* showed that there are possibilities for serious films about rock music, it seems doubtful whether such a downbeat film can become popular with rock fans. And if there is nothing exploitable happening in rock, chances are that rock movies simply won't be produced. ■

Thomas Wiener is on the staff of The American Film Institute Catalog. The first part of this article appeared in November's *American Film*.

The Fuse May Now Be Lit for The Long-Awaited Communications Explosion

Explorations

Satellite Entertainment

Robert Carroll

During the mid-to-late 1960s, forecasts of a coming electronic revolution reverberated through the media. Home videotape units would provide new movies, old movies, new TV shows, old TV shows, sports events, the Metropolitan Opera, the Rolling Stones in concert, newspapers and magazines unrolling like scrolls across the TV tube, language courses, lessons in haute cuisine, painting, sewing, and car repair—all at the touch of a button. A “wired society” was forecast as cable TV systems developed and proliferated through the land; the systems would be plugged into satellites crisscrossing the heavens and beaming countless signals into earth stations and thence into transmitters and the nation’s homes.

Nothing of this was beyond the realm of possibility. The needed technologies already existed; all that *was* needed was the economic impetus and the existence of a “market” (which translates into a multitude of consumers) to bring it all into being. It didn’t happen. Or, at least, it didn’t happen as it was supposed to happen. Home video units are available—at a price—but few have them, and few seem to

The first American Domestic Communications satellite, Westar I prior to launching at Cape Canaveral in April, 1974.

want them. Cable TV systems (CATV, as the field is known) are growing in number, and the homes wired to them are now in the millions, and yet that magical communications explosion is still in the offing.

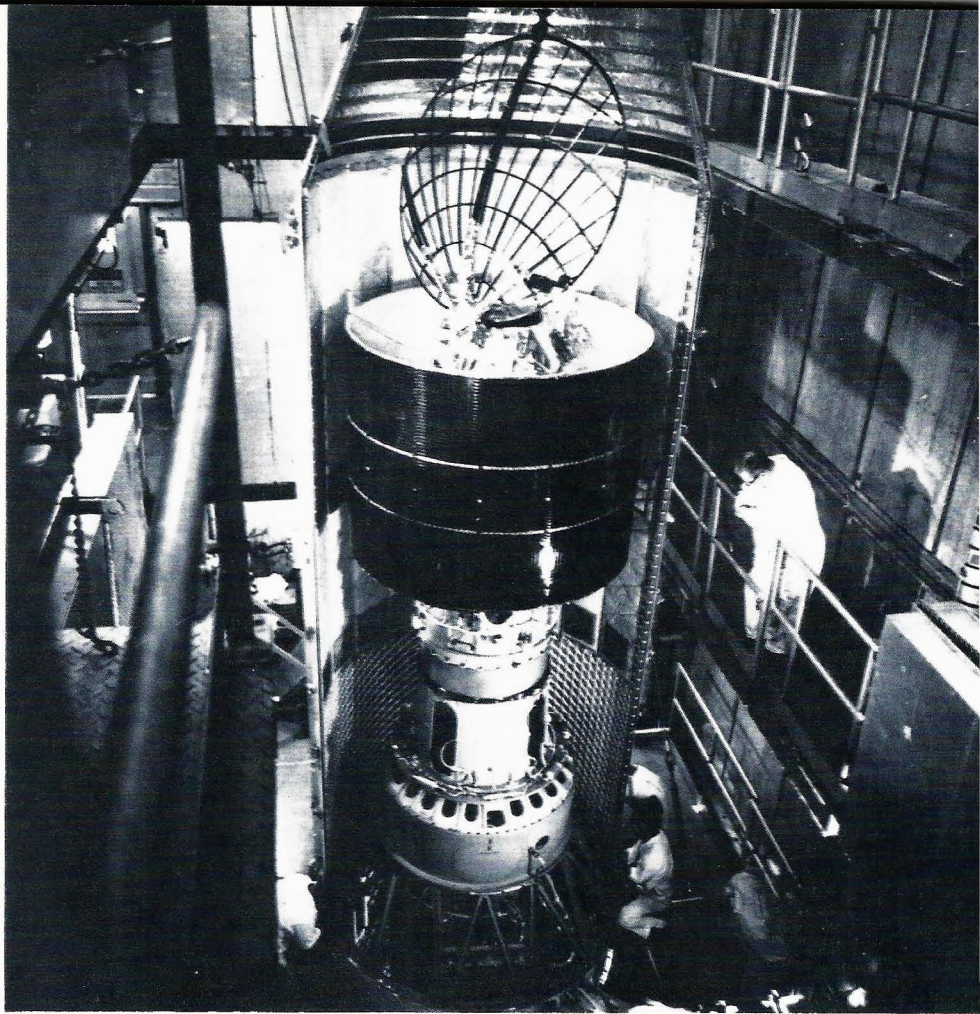
However, the sparks that can set it off are there, and all signs point to something about to happen, and relatively soon. Last year Western Union launched two satellites—Westar I and Westar II—creating the nation’s first domestic satellite system. (Internationally, satellites have been in use for more than a decade.) By next spring two more systems should be in orbit—one operated by AT&T, the other by RCA. Another one is under consideration, with IBM a potential partner. The costs involved are staggering: \$100 million for a satellite system, not counting the earth stations, whose price varies from \$1 million to \$4 mil-

lion depending on the size.

The satellites already have brought significant changes to communications in this country: Among them, sharply lower costs and more flexibility in transmitting telephone calls, data, and radio and television broadcasts over long distances. In some instances, the costs are less than half the conventional rates. But the satellites are expected to do something even more extraordinary. They are expected to create an industry—a new system of nationwide Pay Television, with profound implications for the movies.

Pay Television? For many people, Pay TV has been a faintly insidious presence over the years, a threat to an American way of life—free television. It has been hemmed in by the Federal Communications Commission rulings pressed by the networks, attacked by movie theater owners as a sort of video red menace endangering our precious free airwaves, and bedeviled by high costs and bland programming. Pay TV has floundered on the horizon for the past two decades. A ship full of promise unable to sink or sail.

The statistics themselves are an embarrassment—especially since Pay



TV has been with us for almost as long as television itself. At present, seventy-one million households in this country have television sets, but only 250,000—at most—subscribe to Pay TV. And the majority of the subscribers are concentrated in New York City, hardly Middletown, U.S.A. (To be fair, there has been some growth in recent years in isolated pockets of the country.) But this is not all. What must particularly trouble the sleep of Pay TV companies like Home Box Office, Teleprompter, Cox Cable, Telemation (exotic names compared to the familiar alphabetical euphony of, say, NBC) is a depressing fact. At this moment, more than eleven million households across the country are equipped to subscribe to Pay TV—but don't. They get their commercial television programs through cable systems (CATV) installed since the late forties—originally to bring TV signals to remote parts of the country, but now to provide a wider range of stations and better reception in cities and elsewhere.

Pay TV distributes its programs through these cable systems, or at least through a fraction of them. (It also transmits by MDS—a new system using high frequency signals beamed to pre-wired apartment complexes and hotels. In New York, fifteen percent of Pay TV subscribers are on MDS.) The number of cable systems is rapidly growing. It's expected to triple in the next ten years to thirty-two million users, and all of them potential subscribers to Pay TV.

Mushrooming estimates like these—and the hard actuality of 250,000 subscribers—have made a peculiar blend of optimism-pessimism a way of life for the Pay TV pioneers. Until recently. Now the air is suddenly filled with a gamy optimism and the distant sound of millions of Pay TV signals. There are these developments:

* At least three nationwide Pay TV networks are now in the advanced planning stages.

* Two are expected to be in full operation by late next year or early 1977.

* Ambitious programming plans were recently announced by several Pay TV companies.

The cause for optimism is the satellites—and some recent favorable FCC rulings. Pay TV promoters are convinced that the satellite systems will drive down the cost of transmitting programs to the point where nationwide Pay TV is attractive—and profitable. (Telephone rates are an example: The conventional rate for a private telephone line between New York and California on AT&T's land lines is \$2,174 a month. Via Westar the rate is \$1,000. AT&T's own satellite system should reduce the cost of general long-distance calls.) Television transmission by satellite would work this way:

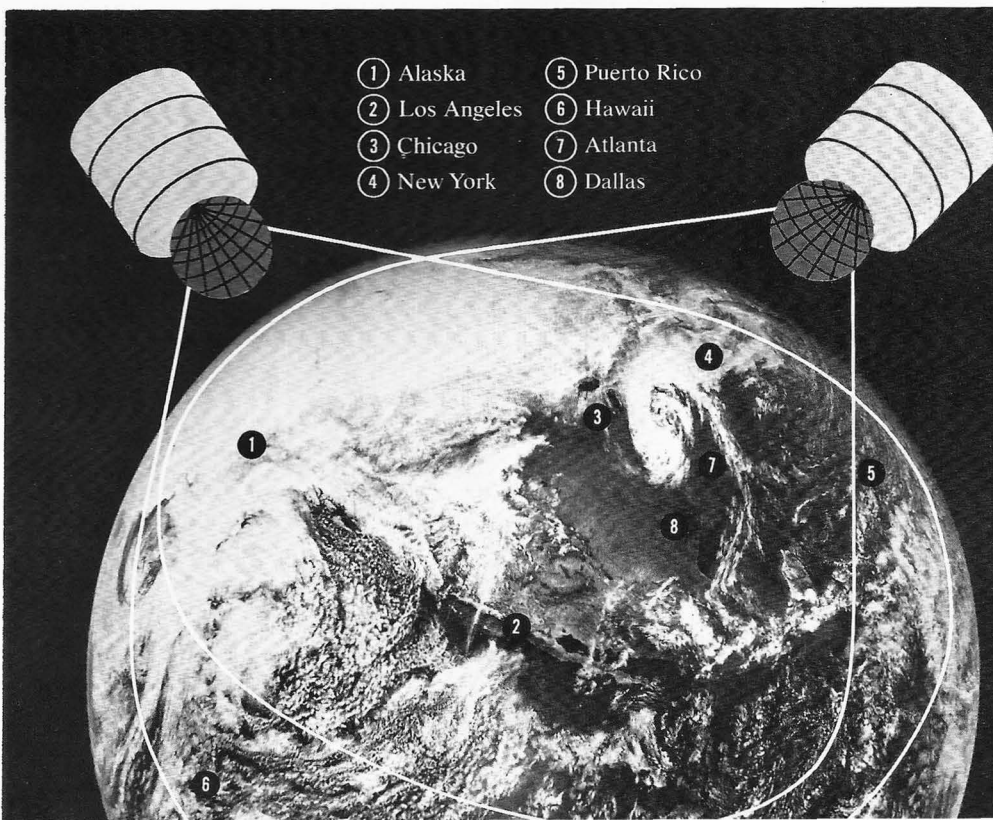
Earth stations would beam programs to a satellite orbiting about 22,300 miles above the equator. Aboard the spacecraft, one of a number of circuits—or transponders—would receive the signals and relay them to smaller receiving earth stations near CATV cable heads anywhere in the country. A Westar satellite has twelve transponders, each of which can handle one television network channel or 600 two-way voice signals. Western Union has so far constructed five large ground stations—in New York, Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas,

and Los Angeles—to transmit and receive voice, data, and video signals. (With the launching of the Westar satellites, the FCC has been swamped with requests for permission to build ground stations: Sixty-eight requests in the last fiscal year, compared to fourteen the year before.) Each satellite is expected to have a life span of seven years, though actual life depends on the fuel supply and the survival of the solar cells which provide electrical power aboard the craft.

A few recent FCC rulings have paved the way for Pay TV's new prospects. In 1972, the FCC reopened to CATV development the hundred top urban markets in the country. The FCC had ordered a freeze on development in the mid-sixties, after anguished cries from commercial television, which saw Pay TV as a threat to its continued dominance. More recently, the FCC, over strong protests from the networks, permitted Pay TV to show movies less than three years old and more than ten years. Previously, the rule was less than two and more than ten; in practice, this meant mostly old movies since few producers chose to sell films while they were still doing well in theaters.

With satellites, earth stations, and new nationwide networks, what can Pay TV subscribers look forward to on their home screen? For one thing, movies. Perhaps a channel offering six to eight first-run movies a month, along with twenty or so "encore"

Satellites, indicating their range, super-imposed on a view of the earth photographed from Apollo 16.



movies—older and classic films. How recent the first-run movies will be depends, no doubt, on shrewd studio calculations and on the growth of Pay TV. If the audience is in the millions and the profits similar, Pay TV may well become an important market for new movies. With an increase in large TV screens, improvements in sound and picture quality, and the growing disinclination of Americans to stir from their couch for entertainment, the Armageddon between Pay TV and movie theaters may finally come to pass. The Television Revolution may then find itself come full circle. The millions who abandoned theaters to sit in front of the tube will return to the movies by way of television.

This time, unlike the past, Hollywood sees the opportunities. In the fifties, as theater attendance slumped and television viewing rose, Hollywood reacted as if it were trapped in *The Towering Inferno*. It alternately fought the flames and panicked in confusion. Finally, Hollywood found itself dragged kicking and screaming toward a new source of profits: Television needed old movies and new series to fill its insatiable appetite. Hollywood complied, and television became another market. But Pay TV—if trends continue—could become the prime market for new movies.

What this forebodes for all the 1-2-3-4 shoebox cinemas in shopping centers around the country is speculative. More important, what a trend toward

Pay TV forebodes for the already hard-pressed small film, experimental film, marginal film, is worth some serious thought. Nevertheless, Hollywood is responding to Pay TV. Recently, Home Box Office and Teleprompter announced plans to distribute first-run movies to more than eighty Teleprompter cable systems throughout the country. Plans are afoot by Western Union and Microband Corporation of America to transmit first-run movies on Pay TV to such cities as Atlanta, Cleveland, Kansas City, Denver, and Seattle.

Besides movies, Pay TV subscribers can look forward to a channel devoted to sports—already, one of the satellites has been carrying ABC's "Monday Night Football." The schedule might consist of ten or twelve national and regional sports events a month, with perhaps twenty repeat broadcasts and films of sports classics.

A channel offering technical or high-level instruction in specific fields is also feasible, according to some observers. They point out that publishers like McGraw-Hill and John Wiley and Sons already have the material and the ability to present technical education programs. Educational programs on Pay TV are already available on the West Coast. (A NASA satellite, though not part of a Pay TV system, has experimentally beamed educational programs to rural communities in six Rocky Mountain states, Appalachia, and Alaska.)

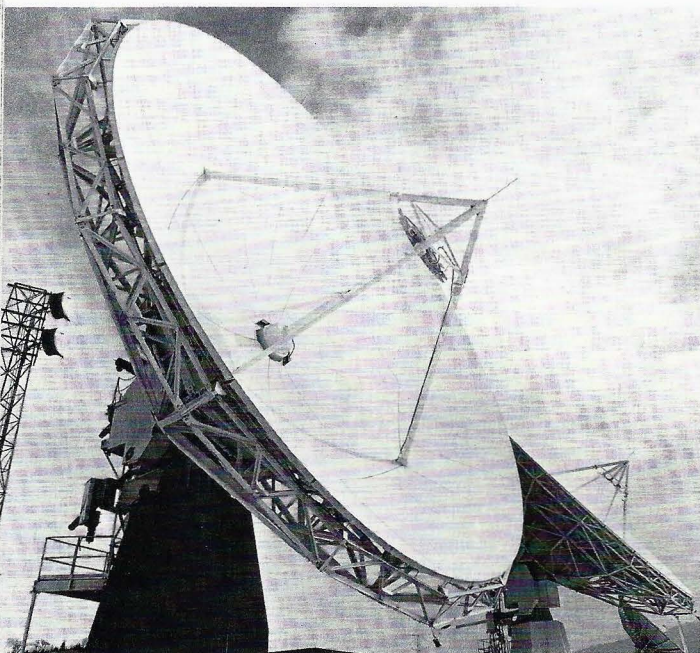
Also under study are:

- * Children's programs on the level of "Sesame Street."
- * "Enrichment" programs offering courses in language, psychology, religion, health, and fashion.
- * Public affairs, with programming on politics, economics, and science.
- * Life and home programs on nutrition, cooking, sewing, baby care, arts and crafts, and hobbies.
- * The humanities and the performing arts, with presentation of opera, drama, music, and discussions on books and the arts.
- * Vocational training, with twenty-four hour programming providing instruction in trades.

These are possibilities, though very few studies have been done to determine how large an audience such specialized channels would draw. How much can a viewer expect to pay for such fare? A moderate, flat monthly fee for each channel—perhaps eight to ten dollars. Pay TV promoters think the price and the fare may be right enough to attract 450,000 subscribers via cable by next year—about double the present number. After that the estimates grow astronomical, but some believe they are, in fact, conservative. In five years, nearly three-and-a-half million subscribers via cable are predicted. In ten years, eight million. Pay TV subscribers via MDS are also expected to increase, though prospects are less certain because the system is so new. But five million by 1985 is possible.

Together, Pay TV subscribers via cable and MDS could well number thirteen million in ten years—one out of every six TV households. "Tollelevision," as Pay TV was once infelicitously called, may finally deliver on its twenty-year promise—and in the process light the fuse to that magical communications explosion.

Robert Carroll is a free-lance writer. Some of the material in this article was furnished through the courtesy of Western Union.



Computer equipped earth stations, such as this, beam transmitted video programs to a domestic satellite. Except for one control station, all will be unmanned.

afi member news



A newsletter from the
Public Information Office
on the Institute and its
activities and programs.

Elected

Charlton Heston has been reelected Chairman of the AFI Board of Trustees, and George Stevens, Jr. has been named to a three-year term as Director and Chief Executive Officer, a post he has held since the inception of the Institute eight years ago. . . . Producer David Brown and

CBS/Broadcast Group President John A. Schneider were elected Vice-Chairmen. Charles B. Ruttenberg and John W. Macy, Jr. were reelected Secretary and Treasurer respectively. . . . Elected for six year terms as Trustees were David Begelman, President of Columbia Pictures; Eric Pleskow, President of United Artists Corporation, and Salah M. Hassanein, President of United Artists Eastern Theaters.

Visiting Directors

The American premiere of *Lies My Father Told Me* launched the Canadian Film Festival at the AFI Theater in the Kennedy Center. The director of the film, Jan Kadar, attended, as did the Israeli actor Yossi Yadin, and the producer of the film, Harry Gulkin. . . . Another visitor to the The-

ater was the leading Indian filmmaker, Satyajit Ray, who introduced and talked about his latest film, *Distant Thunder*. . . . Independent filmmaker Martha Coolidge (*Old-Fashioned Woman*, *David: Off and On*) was in Washington for the world premiere of her new feature, *Not a Pretty Picture*, a dramatic reconstruction of the events surrounding her rape while at school.

Out of the Workshop

Last year the AFI launched a widely publicized project—Directing Workshop for Women—to train women to become film and television directors. The pilot program came to an end early last summer, and the Workshop has now gone into a second year.

What's happened to the first year's graduates? They're making films, naturally.

Julia Phillips became a coproducer on *Taxi Driver* and was signed to direct and coproduce *Fear of Flying* for Columbia Pictures. Lee Grant directed Strindberg's *The Stronger* for the Workshop and *The Use of the Hall* for KCET's Hollywood Television Theater. She has received an AFI grant to direct an independent film, *The Adventures of Jack and Max*. Marge Mullen directed a Mary Tyler Moore television segment. Karen Arthur directed *Legacy* which won the FIPRESCI Award at the Locarno Film Festival. Maya Angelou is writing her third book, *Oh Pray My Wings Are Going To Fit Me Well*, and she directed two shows for the Visions Series on National Education Television. She is also doing preproduction work on *Justice*, a feature. Nessa Hyams, a former vice-president of Columbia Pictures, worked on

the productions *Fear of Flying* and *The Fortune*. Academy Award winner Ellen Burstyn is working on a script for her next film, *Silence of the North*. She directed a half-hour videotape, "Snatchman" for the Workshop, based on a part of Brenda Perla's *The All-American Girl*.

Margot Kidder directed a documentary on the filming of Arthur Penn's *Missouri Breaks* in Montana.

Lynne Littman was associate producer of *Drugs on the Mind*, a Wolper television production. She was also associate producer for *The Gay Woman* and *In the Matter of Kenneth* for KCET-TV.

The Workshop was started last year with a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. This year the Workshop received another grant from the foundation for \$100,000 and a \$10,000 donation from its first-year alumna, Julia Phillips.

The new 1975-76 Directing Workshop for Women at AFI's Center for Advanced Film Studies, includes three actresses (Anne Bancroft, Dyan Cannon, and Trish Van Devere); three writers (Carol Eastman, Judith Rascoe, and Lynn Roth); one lyricist (Marilyn Bergman); one assistant director (Michele Futrell); one script supervisor (Randa Haines); and a producer (Joan Keller).

The program is directed by Jan Haag.

Vintage Prints

Tod Browning was a director of "morbid cinema," as Andrew Sarris has called it. Films like *The Unholy Three* (1925), *Dracula* (1931), *Freaks* (1932) mine our folk unconscious for vivid horrors. But sometimes, under the camera's steady gaze, horrors become benign. For example, *Freaks* turns—perhaps unwittingly—into a work of compassion: The deformed and monstrous members of a traveling carnival show reclaim their humanity before our eyes.

Since the thirties, morbid cinema has fallen on hard times—today it's a world of Jesuits, *Jaws*, and Vincent Price. Browning's work is enjoying a revival, however, and the earlier, less obsessive films are being sought out for study. One example is *Outside the Law*, a rare 1921 film of mayhem and jewel lust starring Lon Chaney and Priscilla Dean.

A complete 35mm nitrate print was recently uncovered by The American Film Institute's Archives, and it has been added to the growing AFI Collection at the Library of Congress. The film is

available for study to researchers.

Other recent acquisitions by the Archives: *Behind the Door*, a 1919 anti-German film directed by Thomas Ince and starring Hobart Bosworth, Jane Novak, and Wallace Beery. The Paramount film joins other Ince productions from the teens and twenties preserved in the Collection.

June Madness, a 1922 "lost" film directed by Harry Beaumont and starring Viola Dana. It was made for Metro.

You John Jones, starring James Cagney, Ann Southern, and Margaret O'Brien. It was donated by Miss O'Brien.

Also, *Throne of the Gods*, a 1933 Lowell Thomas documentary on an ill-fated ascent of the Himalayas in 1930; a 1929 Fox Movietone newsreel showing William Gillette, the famed stage Sherlock Holmes, showing off his model train collection; and *An Intimate Interview with Mae Clark*, an early thirties short.

Films in the AFI Collection are always available for viewing. Appointments may be made with Patrick Sheehan, the reference librarian in the Motion Picture Section of the Library of Congress.

For Life Achievement

On March 8, 1976, William Wyler will be honored by the Trustees of The American Film Institute with its annual Life Achievement Award. The dinner event is to be televised on the CBS Television Network on March 14. The Life Achievement Award is given to an individual "whose talent has in a fundamental way contributed to the filmmaking art; whose accomplishments have been acknowledged by scholars, critics,

professional peers, and the general public; and whose work has withstood the test of time." The three previous recipients were the late John Ford, James Cagney, and Orson Welles. Films directed by Wyler include *Mrs. Miniver*, *The Best Years of Our Lives*, *The Heiress*, *Friendly Persuasion*, *Ben Hur*, *The Little Foxes*, and *Funny Girl*. He is the recipient of three Academy Awards, twelve nominations for producing and directing and, in 1966, received the Irving G. Thalberg Memorial Award.

Save Civilization

"The education of the filmmaker is too important to the future of civilization to be left to chance." So writes Robert W. Wagner, director of Graduate Cinema Studies at Ohio State University, in the introduction to a new book, *The Education of the Filmmaker: An International View*.

The book, a collaboration between AFI and UNESCO, is an anthology of articles on the state of film education in ten countries and one continent, Africa. The countries include, of course, the great political—and film—powers: the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and France. The other countries are Sweden, Belgium, Yugoslavia, India, Japan, and Mexico.

The American Film Institute

Washington

George Stevens, Jr., Director; Richard Carlton, Deputy Director; Adrian Borneman, Assistant to the Director; Bruce Weiner, Associate Director for Finance and Administration; Richard Jones, Chief Accountant; Hollis Alpert, National Director of Publications; Dan Rose, Archivist; Lawrence Karr, Motion Picture Archivist; Michael Webb, Film Programming Manager; Larry Klein, AFI Theater Supervisor; Richard Krafus, Executive Editor, The American Film Institute Catalog; Mel Konecuff, Public Information Officer; Sam Grogg, Jr., Education Liaison; Winifred Rabbitt, Membership Secretary; Ina Ginsburg, Chairman, Fans of AFI.

Los Angeles

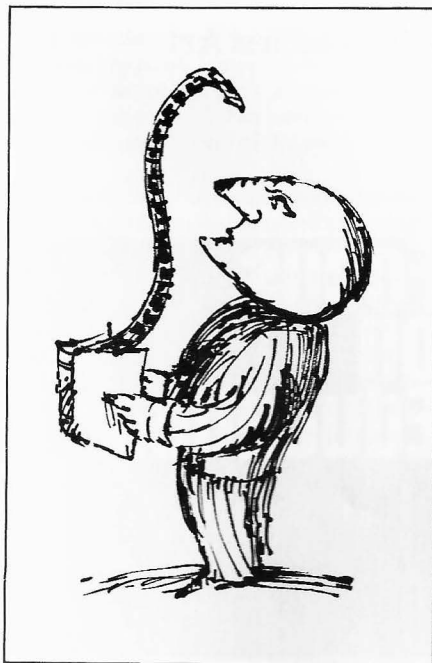
Martin Manulis, Director, AFI—West; David

Lunney, General Manager; James Powers, Director of Center Publications; Jan Haag, Head, Independent Filmmaker Program; Anne Schlosser, Librarian, Charles K. Feldman Library; Roman I. Harte, Production Manager; Antonio Vellani, Chairman, Senior Faculty; Nina Foch, Senior Faculty; Jan Kadar, Filmmaker-in-Residence; Howard Schwartz, Cinematographer; Vaclav Koudelka, Film Librarian; John Bloch, William Fadiman, Lois Peyser, Writers Workshop.

page, and some even to the screen. My task, for awhile, was to keep the balloon of Bogdanovichian romanticism from lifting us clear off the earth. In rereading the book I had decided that, despite my efforts at savage satire, I had still somehow romanticized the place and the people. I never exactly got interested in the book again, but I did get interested in Peter's reading of it. My responses to his responses made for a lively collaboration, and a genuine one, in which the writer's task was to offer constant challenges and correctives to the director's insights.

There are stages in the development of a movie project at which everyone involved may be more or less playing around, waiting for something to take shape. The director, although proceeding routinely with the work on a script, may still only half believe that the book is filmable, or that the picture will ever get made—indeed, he may be only half-convinced that he wants it to, whatever his tongue may be saying all the while. This stage can be ghastly for a writer. He will often be working with very little inspiration himself, while attempting to raise the dramatic potential of the material sufficiently so the director can gear into it, creatively. In many cases this never happens, but when it does—the moment comes when the director begins to sense the picture vividly enough that he is suddenly burning to do it—then the nature of the collaboration changes. Up to then the writer's function has been to stimulate, to sow the scenes with as much suggestiveness as possible; in short, to add anything that might create the possibility of a picture. Once the turning point is reached, however, then his function may be to offer what challenge he can to the often tremendous outpouring of raw response that directors are capable of when their blood is up. The writer then has to help him select the hardest ideas; the swimmers, as it were, which have the best chance of making it upstream, over the many waterfalls that lie between conception and production.

Midway through the second draft of *The Last Picture Show*, I discovered the real reason why writers are ill-advised to script their own books. Indifference and exhaustion in regard to the emotional world of the book can be overcome. Directors can provide all the freshness that's necessary. The real danger is that, in scrutinizing his old text time after time, the writer will suddenly glimpse the book he ought to have written. That is, he may discover a better, a really interesting novel, lying half-covered over in the dust of his old words and old situations. The longer he works on the script, the more of his novel he will uncover to view—his own view, that is. There it was, if only one could have seen it at the time: the



good, rich novel which would have been so much more compelling than the thin, little story one actually wrote. Naturally, the writer will immediately begin to try and squeeze *this* novel into the script. Far from being exhausted with it, as he is with the actual book, its potential shines more radiantly every day.

This, of course, is not a vision the director can be expected to see, since he will, at the same moment, just be discovering the film he wants to make from the book that is there. In the case of *The Last Picture Show*, the better book I discovered had to do with the older couples in the story. While Peter was working out his fascination with youth, I was beginning to develop mine with middle age. I was annoyed that I had wasted so much time in the novel on those uninteresting kids. The novel, I suddenly saw plainly, was a novel about middle-aged courtship in a small town, but by the time I realized it, the script of the old book was almost done, and probably it is just as well that it was—the new story would have made a better novel, but not necessarily a better movie.

A writer who uncovers such a book in the midst of doing a script could, I imagine, make himself infinitely troublesome to a director; even if the director appreciates the new story, he will likely not understand the bittersweetness of the writer's feeling for it. The new story is actually the result of the writer applying whatever experience he may have gained since writing the book to his old characters and situations. The bittersweetness stems from the fact that the writer knows perfectly well he isn't really going to go back and write the new story as a novel; that is, produce a variant of the published

book. The repetition would be intolerable. Thus, he may try even harder to get the new story into the script, feeling that it is its only chance to live. This trouble didn't really arise with *The Last Picture Show*, perhaps because I glimpsed the story so late in the game, though it is possible that the fact that I did glimpse it slightly enriched the generational element in the picture. Peter was quick to utilize the interplay of old, middle-aged, and young for what dramatic value it had.

As we worked through the drafts, one interesting point of controversy emerged, and that was that I didn't think what I was doing should be called *writing* at all. Peter felt this meant that I thought I was too good for the work; that I was writing down. That was not true; it was merely that for the first time I was doing writing in which the execution was really secondary to the conception. The sentences I was putting down obviously didn't count; they weren't going to be photographed and read. The dialogue certainly counted, but then dialogue isn't really what I consider *writing*, even when it occurs in a novel. Good dialogue is a function of the ear, not of the brain. What it seemed to me I was doing was a form of dramatic notation; the hard work had to do with dramatic structuring, not with writing itself.

As I was doing the work, I assumed, I suppose, that a script was an aesthetic creation, but in retrospect it seems to me that an initial script—the script one has in hand the day shooting starts—has two functions, neither of them primarily aesthetic. These two functions are budgetary and psychological. It allows the studio to figure out how many cars to rent, and it bolsters the director's confidence, by allowing him to feel that when he goes out every morning to spend thirty or forty thousand dollars of someone else's money he will know what he is going to shoot. In fact, he only knows there is something he *can* shoot. What he may actually shoot is another matter. By the time *The Last Picture Show* had been in production a week, what had seemed, in script, like a tidy two-hour movie had somehow stretched itself into a potentially awkward three-hour movie. The difference was not in the script, but in the playing, and, since the producer didn't want a three-hour movie, about a third of the script at once became dead weight. The exciting part of screenwriting, in my view, is in the elimination, substitution, and re-creation which occurs at such times, with the cameras rolling and the pressure on. Of that, more next time.

Larry McMurtry, a regular contributor to *American Film*, has written a new novel, *Terms of Endearment*, published by Simon and Schuster.

What are film textbooks for? Why do people write them? What are they used for? What do textbooks, as a group, tell us?

They are general books. They must cover a great deal of material in limited space and sophistication. Most of them are reworkings of the same material and the same format. In a broad perspective, textbooks thus record the film establishment as it shapes its tradition (its orthodoxy, if you will), and they condition how we perceive the world of film. This tradition is familiar to anyone who has read a film text. It consists of a group of films and filmmakers arranged along a progression of styles, periods, ideas, and theories of filmmaking: Porter to Griffith to German expressionism to Russian montage to Chaplin and Keaton to French-centered avant-gardists to social realism to *Grand Illusion* and *Citizen Kane*, and so on. This model changes slowly, usually by inclusion.

Textbooks are also consumer items. Most are designed and marketed much like cars or soaps. They are essentially the same, aimed at volume sales, differentiated on the basis of slight financial, cosmetic, or utilitarian variations. It is obvious that there are so many overlapping, duplicatory film history texts, because each textbook publishing house wants to have such a title on its lists, not because each author has seventy-five to two hundred thousand original words to say. If it weren't for this economic imperative, each succeeding film historian/textbook writer could simply publish as a booklet his additions, deletions, changes, and criticism of the Ur-film history text, saving paper, time, and space.

After reading twenty-eight film textbooks, one a day for a month, I think of them as a conventional and conservative performance—like the playing of classical music, the presentation of Kabuki, or the writing of newspaper editorials—in which a range of material common to all works of the type is rendered again and again, with slight variations and personal touches which alone constitute the artistry. Most textbook writers are unable to clarify their purposes in their prefaces, however much one would like to read, "I'm writing this book because it's different from its predecessors in these crucial ways." Yet there's a facade of isolation about these books, one from another, as if none of them wanted to acknowledge siblings; a silence broken sometimes by quo-

FOCUS on Education

tation from predecessors or made ironic by bibliographical recognition of rivals. The insularity is almost never addressed directly, as it might be through such confrontation as: "Arthur Knight's model is misleading because of x, y, and z; rather, for these reasons we propose that...."

The appeal of the textbook is clear. For the reader and teacher: wholeness, the unification of the field, everything important in one package or, at least, a film epistemology. And for the writer: a fee, perhaps royalties, another item on the vita, and the opportunity to arrange the material his way.

Film texts are written by two groups: those who have been active in making and thinking about film (and so, in writing about them); and authors who keep up with film literature. The latter group is composed mainly of teachers—usually trained in some other discipline than film, like literature—whose books all tend to be quite similar. Unavoidably, this original discipline influences their view of film in areas such as the choice of examples for illustration and analysis. Writers with a literary base usually select—and cumulatively perpetuate—examples conducive to literary values and analysis.

The books considered here, listed on page seventy-eight, all function as introductions to film. Most of them were clearly conceived as textbooks—instructional tools for use in introductory film classes. Many widely used texts were omitted from this survey because they were too specialized: books on how to make films; books on specific filmmakers, films, and genres; books on American films; screenplays; anthologies; and reference books.

These books can be used two ways: Either courses are built around the textbooks, with the instructor and the screenings expanding on the structure of the book; or courses are structured independently of the book's approach, and the text serves as an economical way to provide the student with necessary background and perspective. These textbooks come in three formats: 1. histories, using a chronological progression; 2. collections of essays on selected films; 3. discussions of aesthetic principles which explore elements of film.

The granddaddy of historical texts is Arthur Knight's *The Liveliest Art* (1957). It is still available in its original form and still used, even though the last twenty years of film history have passed it by. This is an influential book. The historically organized textbooks which follow it do so very faithfully—they are variations on its format and material. These books are the most conservative about the film tradition; repeating films, filmmakers, and movements without providing much of an original conceptual matrix for all that data. A colleague who has also spent several years teaching introductory courses to undergraduates feels that all these books are generally inaccurate and unsatisfactory, but that some background in the sequence of film is necessary for his students. He assigns the cheapest historical textbook he can find, often Knight supplemented with Penelope Houston's *Contemporary Cinema* (1963), bringing his textbook coverage within spitting distance of the current.

A limitation of the historical textbooks is that they survey film history from peak to peak, cataloguing films which are great, either for innovations they embody or because of the film community's cumulative esteem. They cover—and so certify—key filmmakers, and important styles, genres, and movements. Consequently, you'll find ample information on American comedies of the twenties because the silent comedians are a major tenet of the orthodoxy. You will not, however, be able to learn much about American comedies of the forties. This is not a major complaint, as these are not intended to be specialized, exhaustive works (although improvement here would be welcome); but it is a limitation which must be kept in mind. It is also one that affects a related problem in a chicken-and-the-egg way, which films do

distributors make available for study?

With one exception, all the history texts reviewed here are adequate introductions. The quality of writing and of thinking, however, is generally mediocre. An educated look at their detailed tables of contents, a leisurely skim through their indexes, and some spot reading of sections crucial to the intended course will give a pretty good idea of each of these books. They are straightforward and easily perceived.

The exception is the one volume impossible to recommend. William Kuhns's *Movies in America* makes you appreciate the serious, sometimes plodding nature of the other histories. The book comes from the tradition of Culkinism in the sixties—the messianic media crusade John Culkin led to turn kids on with movies and television in the classroom. The book has no depth. It's exactly like a commercial for the history of movies. Never mind the analysis of John Ford which stops in 1950, or the listing of Joseph (it should be Herman) Weinberg's books on Sternberg and Lubitsch. For anyone who believes that education and teaching are the processes of helping people learn to think, the magnitude of the problem with Kuhns's book is signaled in the preface's last sentence. "For ultimately, the movies are not there for us to study; they are a heritage and a vision of history, a source of unending discovery and feeling."

The essay collection is a recent type. It is useful if your course focuses on many of the films the books treat at length, or if your course is specifically concerned with criticism and critical writing. Dennis DeNitto and William Herman, in *Film and the Critical Eye*, and Marsha Kinder and Beverle Houston, in *Close-Up*, extend the historically organized accounts of film history. They devote themselves to masterpieces and/or films which have come to exemplify movements ensconced in the tradition. DeNitto and Herman's book is the most accessible for beginning students. Its analyses of fourteen films are from twenty to forty pages long. They are mainly solid, if unambitious, literary readings. As with most texts of the last five years, it is more aware of visual and cinematic points than earlier writings, yet detailed synopses still take up quite a bit of the essay space. Complete credits and bibliographies for each film are included. The bibliographies are provocative and well selected; though for *La Ronde*, a film not often written about, they list F. Williams's analysis of *Letter From an Unknown Woman* (not so specified in the listing) from *Film Comment*, 1969, but not A. Williams's structural study of *La Ronde* from *Film Quarterly*, 1973, the best writing on that film I've encountered.

All the films covered by DeNitto and Herman are from Janus Films. This may influence an instructor's planning, especially of the budget. The authors explain this briefly on page viii of the preface:

To ensure a practical correspondence between what the book discusses and what is actually seen on the screen, we have selected films obtainable for the most part [!] from one renting agent. There are several excellent agencies; however, we elected to work with Janus Films. Not only is their catalogue impressive and, as experience has shown us, their staff helpful and dependable, but their prints are consistently clear and complete.

And hang the expense. This raises two questions. First, why choose Janus among all the excellent agencies? Contemporary/McGraw-Hill and Audio-Brandon/Macmillan have as wide a range and as great a number of classics, let alone domestic giants like Films, Inc. or Universal 16; and they all have better prices. If it's champagne budget time, why not go for New Yorker's toothsome titles? No reasons given.

Next question: Why discuss these particular fourteen films, including two middle-period Bergmans, two Renoirs (guess which), and one and a fraction Truffauts, but feature only one English-language film, and that a silent? It is refreshing to see *La Ronde* and *Il Posto* invited into the respectable club, along with *The Last Laugh*, *The Gold Rush*, *M*, *Grand Illusion*, *The Rules of the Game*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Rashomon*, *The Seventh Seal*, *Wild Strawberries*, *Ashes and Diamonds*, *L'Avventura* and *Jules and Jim*; but I'd have been tempted to stretch it further with selections from Janus's pool of, among others, *The Birth of a Nation*, *King Kong*, *Citizen Kane*, *The Blue Angel*, *Variety*, *Witchcraft Through the Ages*, *Alexander Nevsky* or *Ivan the Terrible*, *La Strada*, *Les Visiteurs du Soir*, *Ugetsu*, *Gate of Hell*, *Paris Belongs to Us....* But no explanation for inclusion/exclusion is given. Granted, mine is a specialized interest, but wouldn't it have more than insider value for books such as this to lay out their criteria for such choices?

If you're interested in this approach, consider Stanley J. Solomon's anthology, *The Classic Cinema*. Its fourteen essays cover many of the same films (*Intolerance*, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *The Gold Rush*, *M*, *Potemkin*, *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, *The Rules of the Game*, *Citizen Kane*, *The Bicycle Thief*, *The*

Seventh Seal, *Vertigo*, *Red Desert*, *Belle de Jour*, and *Satyricon*), but it has three advantages. First, it provides a wide variety of critical points of view—three or four per film; second, its range is better, covering American film, and breaking into post-sixties modern cinema (*Satyricon*); third, it covers more films which schools are likely or able to own prints of—something to keep in mind.

Kinder and Houston's *Close-Up* operates at a higher level throughout. Its coverage is wider because its essays are shorter. The prose and thinking are tighter than DeNitto and Herman's. Kinder and Houston still operate within the conservative tradition (mainly applying literary analysis), but they explore the interface of the tradition in order to put forth new examples, most notably *Performance*, but also including "Rock-docs" and Warhol-Morrisey films. Although the authors claim in the preface, "We do not attempt to cover the historical development of film in this book; nor do we try to select examples from all periods, countries, and genres. We try instead to present a critical approach which can be applied to any film and to illustrate this critical approach with as many examples as possible." The beginning student will have tough sledding figuring out this critical method. He may also be misled by the largely historical organization of the book, which begins with a section on silent cinema in the United States—Porter and Griffith—then Russia and *Potemkin*; *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and expressionism, *The Love of Jeanne Ney*, *The Last Laugh*; realism: French avant-gardists, and *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. The first three decades of sound, up to 1960, are thinly shown by *M*, *Blackmail*, *Citizen Kane*, *Land Without Bread*, *Triumph of the Will*, *Listen to Britain*, and *Night and Fog* (sync sound is really skimmed in this list). This is a classic lacuna in the tradition of film thought, and one challenged by the auteur critics' claims for and emphasis on these decades. Later sections cover neo-realism, the new wave (Truffaut, Godard, Resnais), Fellini, and a good deal on documentary, and more. The reader can learn much more from this book than from DeNitto and Herman.

The third group of film textbooks is the most open-ended, the least prescriptive or limited, and the least confined by the continuing historical model. They are organized as discussions of film principles, which students can then apply to any films they see. Perhaps two tables of con-

Continued on page 78

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The Flash of Recognition

On Silent Film Comedy

Adolph Green

As a passionate devotee of silent films, I am firmly convinced I should and could have written a landmark book called "Silent Film Comedy," if only I had:

- Walter Kerr's encyclopedic knowledge of cinema
- Walter Kerr's impeccable taste and command of the English language
- Walter Kerr's unique critical mind
- Walter Kerr's patience and discipline in creating an exhaustive and unified whole from a duality of love and detached intellectual insight
- Walter Kerr's ability to evoke a sense of poignancy for things past without nibbling at the edges of nostalgia and bathos
- Walter Kerr's uncanny gift of evoking the flash of recognition that pinpoints the essence of a great comedian's style and art—without resorting to stale academic similes and imagery

In short, if only I were Walter Kerr.

Well, Walter Kerr himself has written it¹—a one of a kind book about film comedy; textbook, encyclopedia, and poetic evocation.

It can only have been written by a man for whom the time span of the subject reaches back to the very roots of his memories and sensitivities, and who can view it in perspective as a completed whole—locked forever into the past, a closed form, with beginning, middle, and end.

He carefully lays down the rules of the game in the opening chapters, quoting the paradoxical Mary Pickford statement (previously quoted by Kevin Brownlow in *The Parade's Gone By*), "It would have been more logical if silent pictures had grown out of the talkies, instead of the other way around." Bemused by this seemingly illogical logic, Kerr comes up with what he thinks she had in mind—"A truism not about silent films in particular, but about art in general. . . . Art begins in a taking away . . . limitations that will enable it to suggest more with less."

¹*The Silent Clowns* by Walter Kerr. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 373 pp., illustrated, \$17.95.

BOOKS

Silent films can then be (in the Pickford sense) logically thought of as a further development of cinema, a creative distillation, an art form bounded by self-imposed limitation—the removal of sound.

With this point clearly driven home to us, we are suddenly prepared to observe the silent films with a new curiosity and wonder—as if we had never seen them before or knew what they were really about.

The limitation of silence gave comedy its freedom to proliferate in undreamed of directions into a twentieth century form of fantasy, set in the documentary realism of the everyday world.

Kerr chooses, as a perfect example of the form, a moment from a two-reeler called *Move Along*, with Lloyd Hamilton (an undeservedly forgotten clown of the silents, admired by both Chaplin and Keaton); a moment in which Hamilton puts his foot on the running board of a streetcar in a busy city intersection to tie his shoelace then, having completed the operation, waves the streetcar on.

Says Kerr: "In this tiny fragment of a film, all the essential ingredients of silent film are fully present. The streetcar is a real streetcar. It moves. And it moves without a sound."

And merely reading about this moment moves me to laughter.

This, of course, is the secret of silent comedy, and its power to arouse our interest and deep response so many years later. That instant appeals to our sense of fantasy and the ridiculous, honed to stylistic perfection by comic minds.

On the other hand, Kerr feels that the "Silent Drama" (with, of course, notable exceptions) has grown foreign to us, and that the absence of speech, the superabundance of archaically melodramatic titles, and the florid and ponderous acting techniques have rendered it relatively obsolete.

The stars of "The Silent Comedy" are basically a small group for work of such an epic scale. They mainly consist of Chaplin, Keaton, and Lloyd in the top

and pioneer echelon, followed by Langdon, Raymond Griffith, and Laurel and Hardy.

The Mack Sennett era is generally dismissed as one of archaic, pointless, and charmless violence, and the Mack Sennett influence on the great comedians as a liability, which each shed as his true approach came into focus. Kerr traces the flowering of their styles from the accidental improvised beginnings (the use of the medium because it was there), to the fully realized and integrated creative image.

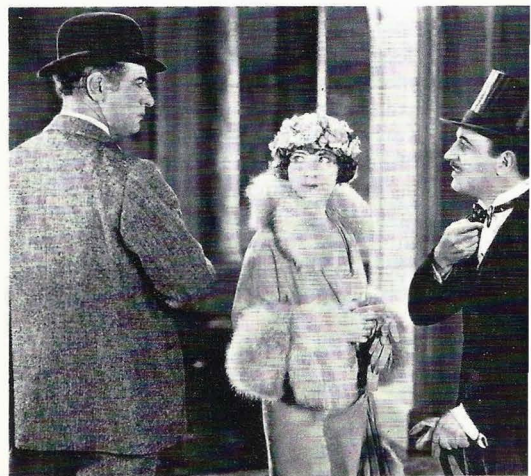
For him Keaton was the "most silent as well as the most cinematic of the silent screen comedians . . . calling direct attention to the camera . . . to its lens—to the frame—to the flat screen on which the image would be projected. . . . We are forever cut off from him by another piece of glass, the lens." The Chaplin figure does not explore the mysteries of the two-dimensional world. He might "pretend there was no lens and so leap through it. Keaton would reach out and rap his knuckles on the glass to show how hard it was."

The focus of a Chaplin film is the image of Chaplin himself, and Kerr's discovery, simple and profound, is that behind the vagabond's mustache and the derby is somebody who could be anybody in the world at a moment's notice, given the simple cue: a compleat husband surrounded by an instantly old-shoe relationship to home and family; a champion roller skater; a jaded man of the world; a skilled hairdresser; bricklayer; great lover; aristocrat; a sudden, momentary homosexual; a hero; a coward; or a hopeless alcoholic.

His detailed analysis of the hidden complexities of *City Lights*, and his description of its character relationships up through the final shattering scene with the no longer blind girl is unique in the annals of film writing.

The Keaton style, his decline and fall and rediscovery in recent years (with *The General* voted as one of the top ten films of all time by the world's leading critics),

Tom Santschi, Betty Compson, and (right) elegant con-man Raymond Griffith in *Paths to Paradise*.



is conveyed with a scientific and passionate thoroughness which leaves me with the sense that Keaton is somehow his favorite of them all.

Lloyd's career is examined and evaluated at great and justified length. As a deservedly popular star of the twenties, he evolved a successful style and character for himself which carried him through the silent era and into several years of talking films. With the simple device of the horn-rimmed glasses, he achieved a personification of the bumbling, shy, middle-class boy who achieves heroic triumphs against overwhelming odds. Never an outstandingly comic figure himself, Lloyd's inventive, elaborately developed chase situations filled with thrills and danger made many of his films exciting entertainments.

Kerr notes that Lloyd made the instant step from silents to talkies without realization of the difference the addition of sound could make to the meanings and effects of his comedy situations. An audience could roll with laughter while gasping in fright at the silent image of Lloyd dangling from the upper floor of an office building in the 1923 *Safety Last*, but the laughter froze when, in the 1930 *Feet First*, Lloyd dangled from an upper floor screaming, "Help! Help!" in a frenzied, upper-register voice. The terror was real, immediate, and the audience failed to find humor in the situation.

The story of Harry Langdon's rise and fall, as a silent screen giant within a period of approximately four years, is a tragedy that no one interested in films has fully understood, or even cared to understand, until recent years. Kerr has a special feeling of tenderness for this semiforgotten figure, who came to the screen in 1924 because of an instinct of Mack Sennett's that he could be made into "something." Already middle-aged, and with a long career in vaudeville behind him, Langdon made several dozen shorts, then the full-length *Tramp, Tramp, Tramp* and *The Strong Man*. He was suddenly an international star, considered by many the equal of Chaplin and Keaton. Langdon was carried away by the adulation; dropped his director, Frank Capra, to go on his own; made several wretched films; lost his style and perspective; and disappeared without ever really knowing what hit him. Kerr clarifies, step by step, what happened; the diffusion and betrayal of a style, whose basic rules and limitations evolved over so short a period, Langdon himself never fully understood.

Kerr further makes it clear why the key to Langdon's appeal is relatively obscure today to even highly enthusiastic silent film buffs. His style existed largely in counterpoint to the comic styles of that moment which an audience knew intimately as part of their daily lives and

experience. Langdon's strange, infantile, tinily etched approach and appearance were variations on familiar themes for an audience now gone.

Raymond Griffith is another forgotten figure whom Kerr finds important as part of any history of film. In the middle and late twenties, he was a leading comedy star at Paramount Pictures, with a fully matured personal approach, based on a tradition of elegance which began many years before with Max Linder in Paris. His effortless, understated, throwaway style, his basic image of the dapper, worldly little con-man, ready to cope with any experience without turning a hair, was an addition of nonverbal high comedy to the later silent film. With the advent of the talking film, Griffith, who could talk only in a hoarse whisper (the result of a childhood accident), disappeared completely as an actor, except for a brief, unforgettable appearance as a dying French soldier in *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

Kerr finally completes his work with the emergence of Stan and Ollie in the last great days of the silent era. The beginnings of the partnership, as mysteriously haphazard as almost everything else in the history of films, took place at the Hal Roach Studios, where it continued for many years. The partnership was unplanned. It evolved over a period of several years with Stan Laurel (at the time a semi-self-retired solo comedian) as the creative gag-man and befuddled, childish clown, and Oliver Hardy slowly easing his way into the complete picture of his fastidious, disaster-prone partner. Suddenly it was all there, and a classic team had arrived.

Kerr describes the miracle of their stepping from the silents into talkies with the greatest of ease and success. It seems that their rapidly developing approach to comedy consisted of a deliberate negation of action, a slowly unfolding elaboration of one destructive situation seen through to its cataclysmic ending, with the locale rooted to one spot. Born in the days of silence, their style was ideal for the enforced physical inaction of the camera of early talking pictures. So Laurel and Hardy, continuing painlessly to develop and grow, made the transition between the two eras and flourished in both.

Walter Kerr has summed up in this remarkable book a vanished art form and a time that is part autobiography as well as critical history. The scope and grasp can only be faintly hinted at in any quick appraisal. *The Silent Clowns* is a book which must be read, and reread.

Playwright and scenarist, Adolph Green is the author (with Betty Comden) of *On the Town*, *Singin' in the Rain*, and *The Band Wagon*.

The Bottom of the Bill

On Reevaluating the Bs

William Routt

When Andrew Sarris's American Directors issue of *Film Culture* came out in 1963, I must have spent three months buried in it. Its effect was much like those consciousness-expanding drugs, and it is not exaggeration to say that a whole generation of American film people felt its impact. Sarris's long list of directors, films, and epigrammatic commentary opened up a whole new area of experience for us, yet one we had always sensed must be there. We finally were discovering in Sarris what it was that had been attracting us to the movies all along. There, in the dark of the theater, Culture was being transformed into culture; and there, for the first time, we had been able to look America in the eye.

At least this is what I got from Sarris, and it may be what Charles Flynn and Todd McCarthy also got, for their anthology¹ of film history and criticism builds from that experience. As it happens, Sarris is a much more respectable fellow than I had thought. His guarded effusions bear witness to a sensibility titillated by, but hardly at one with, the B-movies of my rapt memories. Perhaps Flynn and McCarthy are that way as well, but *Kings of the Bs* could be an important book, nonetheless, in the sense that it could determine the direction that writing about American films will take as Sarris's work once determined the orientation of the American cinema criticism. Recent years have seen serious attention paid to the horror genre, to the postwar crime and social psychology mix labeled film noir, and to the contemporary exploitation film. All of these films, and more besides,

¹*Kings of the Bs* edited by Todd McCarthy and Charles Flynn. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 547 pp., illustrated, \$12.50, paperback, \$6.95.

are surely B-movies—those bottom-of-the-bill programmers and low-budget, quick-profit exercises in sleaziness designed for grind houses and drive-ins. B-films are the movies celebrated in Flynn and McCarthy's bulky anthology; and if this line of interest continues, to have read its 547 pages in the seventies may soon become as *de rigueur* as in the sixties having ingested Sarris's overall legitimization of American cinema.

And there is much that makes interesting reading here. The editors' collaborative piece, "The Economic Imperative," is one of pitifully few respectable attempts to come to grips with the economic facts of the industry. It is packed with information, including some tantalizing budget sheets from Republic Pictures, which almost tell what Hollywood has so far pretty successfully avoided telling anyone—exactly how much who got paid for doing what to whom. The authors are a shade naïve in their unqualified acceptance of the industry's own notoriously unreliable figures, but simply having all this information in one handy place is enough for now. More patient and more devious historians will one day tackle the fascinating problem of what really goes on financially in moviemaking.

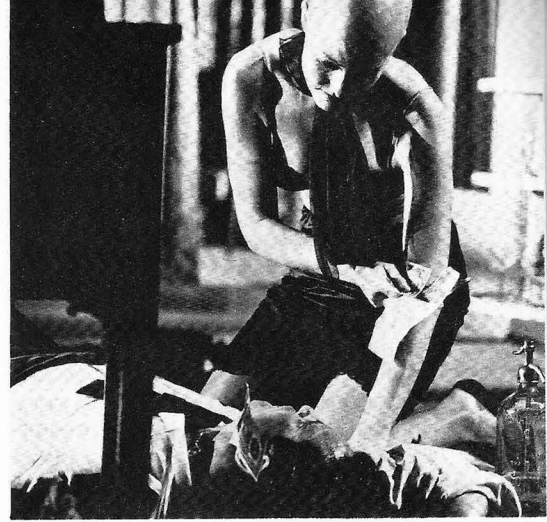
The relationship between such "economic imperatives" and the creation of filmic art is worth a great deal more attention than can be given it in the context of Flynn and McCarthy's factual piece. An intriguing linkage between budgetary demands for the minimum of wasted footage (no *shlick* which might be bumbled, no entrance or exit when nothing happens) and the B-films' "strange, almost cryptic air of flatness and unreality," is suggested by the authors, but deserves more detailed exploration. This economic stylistic practice actually dates back to the early thirties, when Warner Bros. made a virtue out of the incredible penny-pinching of its headmen—only then the result was one of direct naturalism: fast dialogue and snappy editing, flat lighting and tight framing, harsh sound and gritty pictures. The variation in stylistic outcome says much about the complex interactions between finance and art.

Another economic/aesthetic hypothesis not mentioned in "The Economic Imperative" and indeed only glancingly referred to in one or two of the interviews later on, is the notion that B- and exploitation filmmakers actually have *more* artistic freedom than their reputable brethren who make "quality" pictures. The rationale for this argument is that B-films are rented at flat rates as second features and play clearly defined circuits so that income on a given picture can be accurately predicted (this was truest in the era of the double bill, 1935-1955, but is not

untrue, even today). All theater owners want with such movies is something from a recognized category—a "horror picture" or a "skin flick"—at a reasonable price. Whatever else the picture may be—even beautiful or profound—is besides the point. So the B-picture maker, the argument goes, really has a great deal of freedom, provided he can cope with the frantic shooting schedules, the nickel-and-dime budgets, and the stringently limited subject matter. The idea is an intriguing one, borne out in widely scattered examples like the decadent exploitative fare provided by Roger Corman and such glimmers as Anthony Mann's, *The Furies*, a prairie adaptation of Dostoevski's *The Idiot*, and Clarence Muse's heartrendingly ambitious black drama, *Broken Strings*, not to mention contemporaries like Stephanie Rothmann, George Romero, and Ray Steckler (all blood-and-horror directors whose films are listed).

There are nearly two hundred pages of interviews which should prove interesting to those who enjoy finding out what show people think about. The best of these, however, do not appear in the "Interviews" section, but are in the earlier "People" section. They are by Joe Solomon, a feisty independent producer, and by Roger Ebert, whose self-effacing encounters with, and comments on, Russ Meyer, the sensational nudie director, point up a rather disappointing lack of verve and style in the rest of the book. That lack is almost redeemed in the interviews by the aggressively knuckleheaded remarks of Samuel Z. Arkoff (head of American International Pictures, proudly the least arty studio in Hollywood) and the Byzantine reminiscences of Edgar G. Ulmer (whose brooding quickie productions must have bemused more than one spectator in the forties and fifties).

The types Flynn and McCarthy have chosen for this section range all the way from Arkoff's strictly dollars-and-cents approach to Ulmer's overtly acknowledged artist's posture—each as phony as the other. This argues careful selection, but we miss the chance to hear what actors, writers, cameramen, and other studio people might have had to say, for in this book only producers and directors speak for the Bs. But who can quibble with such a gold mine of trivial information? Only here do we learn how Monogram Pictures, the archetypal B-picture studio (it had the Bowery Boys), became respectable just by changing its name to Allied Artists; how folks in the South hid



Sam Fuller's violent *The Naked Kiss*—the ultimate B-movie. Constance Towers is the bald, violence-prone prostitute.

Gene Autry from Republic's process servers when the singing cowboy went on strike for more money; how Pablo Picasso hung out with action director Phil Karlson's second unit and admired his camera setups; and lessons on how (cinematically) to tear a young lady's tongue out, according to the gore master himself, Herschell Gordon Lewis.

Since information is the strong point of the book, it is a great pity that the "Filmographies" section of the work of 325 American directors could not have been better done. In the first place, these lists of titles, dates, and production companies are not really "filmographies"—a term usually applied to more complete lists of production credits. Interesting names like those of William Greffe and Jonathan Kaplan (who are among the contemporaries the editors have declared themselves committed to recognizing) are not there. Yet, more reprehensible is the omission of film lists for Boris Ingster and Edmund Goulding—who are discussed in the text—and the decision to confine the listing to directors only, after so much talk of producers and studios. But worst of all, there is no correlated index of film titles—an omission that cuts down this section's usefulness by half. Unless one can check back via title to director, the B-movie scholar's archival work with grind houses and late night television remains a hit-or-miss business, just as it was before *Kings of the Bs* was published.

I do not mean to be harsh. Most of those 325 directors' film lists are sorely needed and should provide scholars with the foundation for valuable research. But I think it is significant that the book's strengths are almost all in the area of journalism—in the indiscriminate gathering and presenting of information. It is

weakest in the research and rethinking required by history (to confine the era of the B-film to post-sound production is pure sophistry), and it is almost wholly worthless where I would want it to be strongest, in aesthetics.

Back in 1963, Sarris's overview of most of American cinema owed much of its force to the "auteur method"—the identification of consistencies in the work of one director. This book's anthology format suggests that there is not the same degree of theoretic coherence here—and indeed such statements as "The critic's preference ... is ultimately a matter of taste," and "a movie is a movie, nothing more and nothing less," are evidence of a laissez faire attitude on the part of the editors. Yet, the greatest challenge of the B-movie must be the challenge it poses to our aesthetic sensibilities, and only irresponsibility or cowardice will duck that challenge with prattle of "minor movies" as this volume too often does. Of the writers represented, only two are working out of what can fairly be described as a "B-movie aesthetic." The rest seem to be slumming.

The two denizens of Poverty Row are Manny Farber and his premier disciple, Richard Thompson. For my money, Thompson's writing is the most pointed and stimulating in the collection. His position is simply that what we have learned to think of as art gets in the way of what he calls here, in a piece on Robert Mitchum's *Thunder Road*, the "truth" of a work. For him such truth comes about through methods which are "intuitive and associative," as he says of Jungle Sam Katzman's serials and musical fad productions—clearly methods which are found more often in the desperate improvisation of a B-filmmaker than in the establishment reflections of an A. None of this constitutes a carefully worked out theory of popular art, but just as surely the materials are here at hand.

And we do need such a theory—an anti-art aesthetic, if you will. We need a context within which such unabashedly commercial products as B-movies can be examined without prejudice, a context of validation. The experience which is the foundation of this book—that experience of which Sarris first made us aware in his recognition of such B-talents as Ulmer, Karlson, and Joseph H. Lewis—demands no less. If it is not forthcoming, we will have once again muffed the opportunity to go beneath our elitely cultured "tradition of quality" to the raw bone and flesh that makes up art for almost everyone brought up outside of that tradition.

William D. Rount is a lecturer in The Department of the History of Art at Yale University.

Consciousness Rising

On the Female Filmmaker

Joan Mellen

It is rather a spurious premise indeed that films directed by women automatically, virtually by definition, offer a more enlightened image of women than those that are the products of men. Yet that is the *raison d'être* of these two catalogue-like books¹ which list, ad infinitum, the names of women who have been film directors, editors, screenwriters, and producers. Neither book so much as raises the question of the quality of consciousness comprising a feminist perspective. Betancourt lists a few films by men, arbitrarily chosen, as if to imply that there have been a few men in the history of cinema concerned with the plight of women, and thus that men may be "feminists" too. Buried within the childlike, almost unreadable summaries of the films, which Betancourt finds put "women in focus," is a most pertinent statement by Agnes Varda which both Betancourt and Smith would have done well to ponder. "Women hold a lot of positions; it is in terms of consciousness that we have not got it right." Uncommented upon as it remains within Betancourt's text, Varda's caution could stand as a corrective to the kind of mindless so-called feminism which assumes that we must pay obeisance to any work done by a woman, past or present.

Women In Focus is by far the weaker of these two handbooks. Written by a high school teacher, it is designed precisely for high school teachers of film in search of films by and about women to show their classes. It assumes no prior

¹*Women In Focus* by Jeanne Betancourt. Dayton, Ohio: Pflaum Publishing, 186 pp., illustrated, \$10.95, paper, \$7.95.
Women Who Make Movies by Sharon Smith. New York: Hopkinson and Blake, 307 pp., illustrated, \$9.95, paper, \$5.95.

knowledge of any of the films. In fact, should the reader happen to have some acquaintance with the films summarized, the book becomes an embarrassment. The judgments seem so arbitrary, the "analysis" so lacking in objective criteria as to make the plot summaries in which the book consists read like a series of compositions written by high school students which the instructor would be forced to grade harshly for the total absence of substantiation of any of their judgments. A film called *Childbirth* is labeled "visually strange"; of *Cover Girl: New Face in Focus* Betancourt writes, "I came away from seeing it with feelings of nausea and amazement." *Dream Life* is called "a lot of fun." Of *Park Film* the author gushes, "because of this media image, seeing couples often lowers a girl's self-esteem. What a refreshing change to see the myth nudged (though not busted) and girls dealing with it!" The films are listed in alphabetical order, allowing Betancourt no opportunity to differentiate the amateurish from the film of true artistic merit, a minor film about Virginia Woolf from the films of Vera Chytilova, Mai Zetterling—or Julia Reichert and Claudia Weill.

Worse is the arbitrary choice of woman directors represented. Not one of Dorothy Arzner's films is discussed, although she was (and remains) the most acknowledged of woman directors in the history of the American film. One can only conclude that Arzner has been purged from this compendium because her films defy Betancourt's simplistic premise that films by women automatically reveal, in Betancourt's own words, "the qualities of life that concern women." Yet Betancourt also suggests that all the films she has chosen "present real women," and it would be difficult indeed to argue that none of Arzner's women could be so described. Absent also is Lina Wertmüller, the most vital and interesting woman directing today and in whose films the image of women is complex indeed, defying narrow-minded "feminist" criteria. The women portrayed in the Wertmüller films, often played by Mariangela Melato (*The Seduction of Mimi*, *Love and Anarchy*, *Swept Away by an Unusual Destiny In the Blue Sea of August*) are strong and self-assertive. In both *Mimi* and *Swept Away* Melato is the most politically sophisticated character in the film, an opponent of cant and the special brand of sectarian hypocrisy afflicting supporters of the Italian Communist Party. Even in *Swept Away* when she is the selfish, capitalist exploiter, Wertmüller allows Melato to express the director's own anti-Stalinism and fresh, independent approach to political questions.

Equally missing from Betancourt's pantheon of woman directors is Leni Rie-

fenstahl, the controversy around whose "fascist art" Betancourt prefers to evade rather than face, assuming that she is aware of its existence for the past several years. Nor are we informed of the films of Susan Sontag, Shirley Clarke, or Liliana Cavani. Barbara Loden's *Wanda* has also been omitted by fiat as an important film directed by a woman. And serious young independent filmmakers like Karen Sperling are also conspicuously absent.

The male directors admitted into this little circle, people like Abram Room, Kenneth Loach, Jean-Louis Bertucelli are rather odd choices, not because their films should be banished from a study of the image of women in film, but because their work pales before the studies of the psyches of women offered by others. Betancourt's rather spotty knowledge of film history leaves her unaware of directors so much more concerned with the damage inflicted upon women by bourgeois society and whose body of work is of far greater artistic merit, people like Luis Buñuel. Nor is it defensible to discuss directors sympathetic to the oppression of women throughout history without so much as mentioning Kenji Mizoguchi, whose central concern was the position of women in feudal and neo-feudal society and who is, moreover, the greatest director Japan has produced within a national cinema replete with brilliant practitioners of the art. More recently Susumu Hani has assumed the theme, demystifying the notion that post-war Japanese women are more liberated than their sisters who had suffered the indignities of the Confucian obediences under official feudalism and fascism.

Women In Focus is finally little more than an opinionated, unrelieved, and self-righteous list of films accompanied by facile and unilluminating comment putting forth the author's personal preferences. There is little attempt to assess the value of any of the films, allowing us to believe that they are all masterpieces of one variety or another. The headnotes appended to each summary are particularly self-serving, although the prize for promotional pap must go to Betancourt's quotation from the Communist Party organ, *Daily World*, to precede her discussion of Angela Davis—*Portrait of a Revolutionary*. Her discussion of this film stands as a paradigm for the sloppy writing found throughout this book. Betancourt writes: "That Angela's commitment is self-sacrificing and powerful can never be mistaken," and, a few sentences later, "Angela Davis's single-mindedness cannot be mistaken."



Phillips Holmes, Anna Sten in Dorothy Arzner's *Nana*. "Anti-feminist stereotypes?"

Women Who Make Movies is a more ambitious book, purporting "to present a history of woman filmmakers" and "to identify the new woman filmmakers." In its second part, in which the work of young, independent woman filmmakers is described, the book performs a valuable service. In its "history" of women who have made films it suffers from many of the faults of Betancourt's extended pamphlet. To present in 222 pages a meaningful discussion of the films of all the important women who have ever directed, written, or edited films in all countries of the world was a task with which Smith seems to have had neither the time, nor the energy, nor the research facilities to cope. Whole pages simply name women whose work is not accessible or known, along with titles of their films, without so much as a word about their subject matter, let alone their merit. Where there are judgments, they are tossed in without preparation for the reader nor substantiation, as when Smith seems to blame the mutilation of Erich von Stroheim's *Greed* on editor June Mathis. Mathis, says Smith, executed the task "with a cold-heartedness that made Hollywood gasp." While the history of what happened to *Greed* admittedly falls beyond the scope of Smith's work, to mention the role of the woman who implemented the decision to decimate Stroheim's film without indicating what forces lay behind the destruction of what remains one of the finest films ever made in America is shabby film history.

Yet Smith also provides us with some fascinating material, such as her discussion of Alice Guy Blaché, who claimed that her *Good Fairy in the Cabbage Patch* (*La Fée Aux Choux*, 1896) was the first film ever made with a plot line. Madame Blaché was a producer and director

with her own company (in the United States) from 1910 through 1919, after which her experience back in France replicated the discrimination endured by so many women in film then and since. Of interest also to the reader is the all-too-brief discussion of Lois Weber, the first American woman filmmaker who had directed by 1920, Smith records, over seventy-five pictures.

Smith's study, however, swiftly degenerates into a breathless listing of one woman after another. As in the case of Betancourt, there is no analysis or any comprehension of the aesthetic and substantive qualities of the films mentioned. The author assumes that they are all of interest because a woman was involved in their production in some capacity. Plot summaries and quotations from other critics clot the pages of Smith's discussion of Dorothy Arzner, with no coherent point of view emerging as to her achievement either as a filmmaker or as a contributor to the perception of the role and experience of women. Unwilling to face Arzner's frequent anti-feminist stereotypes and failing to discuss the degree to which these color Arzner's treatment of her woman characters, Smith resorts to cryptic innuendo and evasiveness which, it seems, she imagines will go unregistered by feminist readers. "Viewed today," she writes of Arzner's *Craig's Wife*, "the neurotic Harriet Craig might raise some hackles."

Smith, like Betancourt, is happiest when she can avoid the ambiguities inherent in her subject matter and retreat into rhetoric. "One of the most gutsy women in Hollywood," writes Smith, "Ida Lupino is also one of the most talented." Shirley Clarke, she pontificates, "personifies through her assertiveness, her original subject matter, and her independence of Hollywood, the spirit of the new generation of woman filmmakers." It must also be said that Smith's book contains an absorbing interview with Clarke, containing valuable information about her little-known film, *A Scary Time*, which exposes the hunger of the world's children and was first commissioned and later suppressed by the United Nations.

Of Lupino's films we learn little. Smith barely informs us of their setting, providing neither plot summaries nor analysis and discussion of their merit. The names of women who co-directed films with men are mentioned with no information supplied regarding whether the "collaborations" were authentic or in name alone, or if indeed the major responsibility was that of the woman co-director. The absence of an inquiring approach to her subject matter causes Smith to omit the mention of the self-hating image of women which emerges in the films of Elaine May

Continued on page 78

or the misanthropy and the repulsion of the director toward both male and female characters found in the films of Susan Sontag. There is nary a word regarding the political naïveté or lack of intelligent critique in Shirley MacLaine's paean to the freedom of the women of China in *The Other Half of the Sky*.

One is forced to the conclusion in reading Smith's book that she has not seen many of the films she mentions or briefly describes. *The Night Porter* does not describe a sadomasochistic relationship begun with a "rape." Many of her facts must have come to her second or third hand, or how else could she make the wildly untrue statement that the Japanese actress Kinuyo Tanaka has been directing films every two years? Leni Riefenstahl's film is called *Olympiad*, not "Olympia," as Smith refers to it four times. It is painful to have to cite errors of this kind. But it is essential that we demand intellectual rigor and honesty of women—or of any discriminated against group—if the patronizing double standard we detest is to be truly opposed. Only those who at some level doubt or fail to value the real capacities of women could think otherwise.

The section of Smith's book devoted to independent woman filmmakers, who are quoted describing their problems at length, (and whose addresses are given in a directory) offers instances of enlightenment. There are some poignant citations, such as Wendy Wood Chapple's account of how being educated as "a girl" hampered her as a film director:

"What is a watt, a circuit, an ohm—how do you fix a motor, wire a lamp? All of these things you *have* to know to be a competent independent filmmaker...."

But these fleeting moments cannot salvage either book. Both Smith and Betancourt, in their careless rush to announce that women *are* making films and that talented woman filmmakers exist, do us finally a disservice through their very hastiness. Fearing to discuss critically or to relate the cause of women to an assessment of intellectual or artistic weakness as well as strength, they have sacrificed all standards and consideration of what could constitute either a valid feminist approach or a film of excellence and daring. We are left mired in a morass of detail, a who's who, the entries of which are chosen, in Smith's own words, "pretty much at random." Feminists, and all people devoted to the art of the film, deserve, and must continually demand, something better.

Joan Mellen is the author of *Women and Their Sexuality in the New Film* and of *Marilyn Monroe*.

tents will illustrate. Lee R. Bobker's *Elements of Film: Story and Script; Image; Sound; Editing; The Director; Acting for Film; The Contemporary Filmmaker; and Film Criticism*. Lincoln F. Johnson's *Film: Space, Time, Light and Sound: Film as a Unique Medium—Space; Movement in the Articulation of Space; Time as a Plastic Element; Structures in Space Time—Continuity, Harmony, and Contrast; Color; Sound; Structures in Space-Time—Tenses in Film; Modes; Genres; The Filmmakers*.

Some of these treatments take special approaches: superficial, as William Jinks's pushed rhetoric of language and literature in *The Celluloid Literature* (similar to John Harrington's use of rhetoric as an angle in *The Rhetoric of Film*); or fundamental, as in Robert Gessner's devotion to narrative and its operation in *The Moving Image*, Roy Armes's investigation of different uses of reality in *Film and Reality*, or James Scott's careful integration of critical and historical notions in *Film: The Medium and the Maker*. Special features should be noted: Johnson's extensive shot-by-shot presentations and visual emphasis in *Film: Space, Light, Time and Sound*; Roy Huss and Norman Silverstein's system of cinematic notation in *The Film Experience*, more baroque than Gessner's; Roy Madsen's long section on film and education, his insistence on treating film and television as a single, equal process, and his lavish bibliography in *The Impact of*

Film; Gessner's tests for plastic sensitivity, visual memory, and visual intelligence; and Ivor Montagu's presentation of film as interrelating systems in *Film World*. Use and Level are more serious considerations within this group. Gessner and Madsen are too concentrated for casual use by beginners, unless the class is built around the texts. V. F. Perkins's *Film as Film* is used by some instructors with beginners, but it is really an intellectual history of the cinema (with excellent use of concrete examples) which finishes by considering criticism and evaluation as practical problems. David Thomson's *Movie Man* also requires closer teaching than most of these volumes, as it's a fascinating auteurist/McLuhanist version of Montagu's *Film World*. Stanley Cavell's *The World Viewed* is a lot like Perkins's text, but more informal; an excellent philosophic reflection on cinema, fine for advanced classes, probably confusing for beginners.

These books stress the relation of film to other arts in varying degrees. Most of them assume a common literary/dramatic vocabulary, with concepts of character, plot, theme, symbolism, and so on. Discussions of visual, musical, or other arts with relation to film are not de rigueur and should be checked in searching for appropriate textbooks.

Richard Thompson is a free-lance writer who formerly taught film at the University of California, Riverside.

Twenty-eight Film Textbooks:

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 Casty, Alan. *Development of the Film*. Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1973.
 Cavell, Stanley. *The World Viewed*. Viking, 1971.
 DeNitto, Dennis & William Herman. *Film & the Critical Eye*. Macmillan, 1975.
 Dickinson, Thorold. *A Discovery of Cinema*. Oxford, 1971.
 Fell, John L. *Film: An Introduction*. Praeger, 1975.
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- Kuhns, William. *Movies in America*. Pflaum, 1972.
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 Linden, George W. *Reflections on the Screen*. Wadsworth, 1970.
 Lindgren, Ernest. *The Art of the Film*. Macmillan, 1963.
 MacGowan, Kenneth. *Behind the Screen*. Delacorte, 1965.
 Madsen, Roy P. *The Impact of Film*. Macmillan, 1973.
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 Stephenson, Ralph & J. R. Debrix. *The Cinema as Art*. Penguin, 1967.
 Thomson, David. *Movie Man*. Stein & Day, 1967.

Richard Thompson has charted the twenty-eight textbooks listed in relation to thirty-two categories including the use of visuals, format, level, range of coverage, and topics discussed. This chart is available free of charge from the Education Liaison Office of The American Film Institute.

Recent writings of note on film and television. For information on where listed publications can be obtained write to Education Liaison, The American Film Institute, J. F. Kennedy Center, Washington, D.C. 20566

Whatever Happened to Lawrence Welk?

Television commercials have settled in the just-plain-folks countryside, Jeff Greenfield observes. Notice the proliferation of ads for breakfast foods, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Polaroid, and Chevrolet invariably plunked down in the yard of an old country home. In the sixties the message was urban—or suburban—but not any more. “Home, hearth, fresh air are now as pervasive a cliché of the advertising community as were rock music and freeze frames a few years ago,” Greenfield writes. The new ads suggest “that the yearning for simplicity, for quiet, for roots, for a ‘real home’ has once again surfaced, and with a vengeance.” Not that Americans are about to settle down on the farm. But “the disaffection with the living patterns of an overcrowded city or atomized suburb has made America’s old way of living once again a compelling frame of reference for selling a product.” The ironies in all this are awesome, Greenfield says. For example, it was mass packaging and promotion that “helped uproot so much of the stable, tranquil America in the first place.” But to Greenfield the more serious irony is this: TV advertisers, seeking the young and urban, shun the older, rural audience and force cancellation of shows—like “Lawrence Welk”—which

appeal to a non-urban audience. “Thus we face the ultimate joke—the advertising community is busily engaged in appealing to a big city-suburban cosmopolitan audience by evoking for them a way of life whose current adherents are considered undesirable.”

“Boob Rubes” by Jeff Greenfield. *Columbia Journalism Review*, September-October 1975.

Now Auteur Commercials

What does a director of TV commercials think of his work? *Filmmakers Newsletter* interviewed Bob Giraldi, one of the hottest makers of commercials (and the winner of six Clio awards last year) and got an answer. He takes it very seriously, even to developing a recognizable style characterized by “a certain sense of immediacy and excitement.” Giraldi calls it “presence,” as in such commercials as Dr. Pepper “Pepperettes,” Johnson’s Baby Powder “Roommates,” and “Vitalis Locker Room.” His approach: “We never show backs of heads, profiles, or people talking away from the camera. The objective is to make the viewer feel that somebody’s always coming right to him, and consequently the viewer’s involved.” He also demands a say, sounding like a young director facing a studio. “I’ll absolutely insist on having my opinions heard about which take to use. After all, I directed it—I felt it.”

“Bob Giraldi: Making TV Commercials” by Andrew C. Bobrow. *Filmmakers Newsletter*, September 1975.

Intellectual Vacuum?

After decades of neglect, screenwriters are now getting recognition—but ironically “at a time when the quality of American screenwriting is deteriorating,” Stephen Farber writes, and when “most popular American films are mindless and manipulative, devoid of wit or imagination or humanity.” But during the years of neglect—like the thirties and forties—“screenwriters contributed the stylist dialogue, the vivid characterizations, and the sheer narrative drive which kept the general level of movies so high....” In those days Hollywood drew such famed writers as William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Lillian Hellman, S.J. Perelman, and Christopher Isherwood. In fact, for a time Hollywood was a “stimulating literary and intellectual capital.” The end of that era—and of good screenwriting—came with the investigations of the House Un-American Activities Committee; the sophisticated left-

wing writers stayed East. Today, writers are wary of Hollywood, partly because of the difficulty of getting a script produced and the insistence on box-office stars. The result is a new breed in Hollywood. “Most of the young screenwriters are not published writers, and they are certainly not intellectuals; they are commercially oriented, with a shrewd sense of the marketplace.” One Hollywood observer says: “Today most of the young writers one meets are straight out of the universities. They’ve never worked, they come from middle-class homes.” And most of the successful screenwriters—Robert Towne (*Chinatown*), John Milius (*The Wind and the Lion*), Walter Hill (*Hard Times*)—are native Californians. “Hollywood,” Farber broods, “is more an insular community than ever before, and writers are more isolated.”

“Where Are the Hemingways, Fitzgeralds, Benchleys, and Parkers of Yesteryear?” by Stephen Farber. *New Times*, 19 September 1975.

Flesh and the Devil

The Mafia has made millions by infiltrating the pornographic film business and now threatens to become a force in legitimate films. Nicholas Gage, the investigative reporter, gives the following: Mafia figures control distribution of *Deep Throat* and *The Devil in Miss Jones*; the Mafia has distributed pirated prints of *Behind the Green Door* and *The Life and Times of Xaviera Hollander*; the makers of *Flesh Gordon* and the nonpornographic *Bambina* openly acknowledge dealings with the Mafia (“We’re pro-Mafia around here”); the son of a Mafia-linked figure runs Bryanston Distributors, which handles *Coonskin*, and Andy Warhol’s *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*. Typically, Gage reports, the Mafia tries to force a filmmaker to deal with a certain distributor, promising protection from piracy, and warning of “grave consequences.” Gage, noting that several Mafia-linked figures have moved from porn to legitimate films, quotes a New York police official: “If the trend continues, these people are going to become a major force in the movie industry within a few years.”

“Organized Crime Reaps Huge Profits From Dealing in Pornographic Films” by Nicholas Gage. *The New York Times*, 12 October 1975.

Rock Knocked Out

Except for guest shots, “good old brain-damaging rock and roll is once again ex-

cluded from prime-time television," a *Rolling Stone* editor mourns. Why? For one thing, Ben Fong-Torres writes, rock is in a general slump these days; for another, rock groups—especially the top ones—avoid television in order to build "mystique" and profits. New rock artists find television is good promotion, one group's manager states. "But after a group's become a headliner, giving away the act is detrimental." Two late-night shows—"Midnight Special" and "Rock Concert"—are now in their third year, but they both have grown pallid with mass-audience concessions, Fong-Torres says. There is PBS's "Soundstage," also suffering from the doldrums, but—with no commercial breaks—kinder to the rock artists. Meanwhile, TV rock show producers dream of the future and prime time. "I think the market is ready for a Three Dog Night, a Captain and Tennille, in a situation-comedy form—in a possible family environment. Say, a Rob Reiner role played by the Captain, and Sally Struthers as Toni...." (And Sly and the Family Stone as the black folks next door?)

"The Decline and Fall Season of Rock on TV" by Ben Fong-Torres. *Rolling Stone*, 9 October 1975.

Faulty Families

Television's "new breed" of situation comedies—like "All in the Family" and "The Mary Tyler Moore Show"—are ultimately after neither controversy nor liberalism. Dorothy Rabinowitz argues that "no matter how many progressive positions" "All in the Family" endorses, "the show's main dramatic energies" are bent "precisely on establishing the irrelevance of the new and the progressive to the life and style of the lovable Bunkers." The series, "in the oldest tradition of radio and television, illustrates the superiority of home and hearth over adventure, of the simple life over the grand." Similarly, "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" has its heart, not on debate, but "on rendering urban types, all of whom have their shares of neurotic tendencies." Rabinowitz observes that not surprisingly "there is comfort as well as fun in these comedies." They acknowledge that "in the service of ambition, in the operation of their most intimate relationships, all kinds of fine people are full of neurotic hungers, lying impulses, and shoddy vanities." The sitcoms "tell us what we had hoped all along was true: That it is *for* our faults we are loved, really, not in spite of them."

"Watching the Sit-Coms" by Dorothy Rabinowitz. *Commentary*, October 1975.

Voracious Jaws

If you are seeing fewer movies and enjoying them more, it means all's well with Hollywood's research, a *New York Times* story reports. "Leaders of the movie industry say that fewer films are making more money these days because studios are doing a more sophisticated job of market research to predict audience response. They are more skilled in advertising and promoting films, and there is more emphasis now than five years ago on so-called 'mass audience' films." But the curious fact remains: Hollywood profits are up, but fewer films are being made. One Wall Street analyst explained: "What you are seeing is the effect of an oligarchy at work, with a relatively small number of producers supplying a large number of exhibitors dependent on these few suppliers at a time when demand for movies is growing." He cited *Jaws*, produced by Universal. "It is tying up so much theater time around the country that Universal feels it would be foolish to produce more pictures and compete with themselves. Why should they do it?" Small films—or "marginal products," as Hollywood calls them—are in trouble, now that Hollywood has relearned how to make the mass audience film.

"Hollywood Scenario: Boom and Bust" by Robert Lindsey. *The New York Times*, 26 September 1975.

Precious Heritage

Old movies are suddenly popular, but myths about them still survive, Andrew Sarris observes in a rambling, affectionate essay. Old movies reflect, not an innocent age, but "an interplay of ironies with the familiar conventions"—for example, the happy ending offset by an "utterly miserable middle." True, old movies shunned politics and the "downtrodden and the exploited," but they "preached a gospel of social mobility.... Audiences everywhere in the world could sniff out the essential egalitarianism of the Hollywood ethos...." The actors were *not* "all pretty glamour boys"; the "relatively unprepossessing" Edward G. Robinson, James Cagney, and Paul Muni all gained top billing. Old Hollywood gave us "an expressive idea of reality"—hence New York as a gauzy Mecca; new Hollywood, on a vogue of location shooting, gives us "only an extended image of reality." But more important, the old moviemakers, thinking they were unnoticed, slipped in "odd intimations of their own personalities." Old movies, Sarris declares, are cryptograms—"a precious

heritage, and, properly decoded, they tell us more than we may want to acknowledge about the true fantasies of human nature."

"The Myth of Old Movies" by Andrew Sarris. *Harper's*, September 1975.

Mythic Murder

The debate over violence on television goes on, but "it is hard to believe that more than a cosmetic alteration will be produced by censoring gunfights in TV entertainments," Michael J. Arlen writes. The reason is that violence on television only reflects "problems arising from our deeper natures." These problems have to do with our American past and "the uniquely American character not only of our violence but of our literary and mythic response to that violence," he says, citing a scholarly study by Richard Slotkin. One enduring myth altered the Puritan violence against the Indians into a "redemption" of the land and the original inhabitants; another—the "captivity myth"—turned the settlers into passive victims who finally turn to "violent retribution." These myths, Arlen writes, served to hide the truth from the guilty Puritans, and the myths led to the "wilderness-tamer" of Daniel Boone and the bloody hunter of Davy Crockett—"philosophizing, redemptive." The myths, Arlen finds, have survived—on television and elsewhere. "Murder as redemption! Aggression as passivity!" We are stuck while we await the "eventual disintegration of our myths" and "the guilt that produced those myths." Arlen states, "The wilderness of the mind was never cleared as much as we thought."

"The Air: Blood Marks in the Sylvan Glade" by Michael J. Arlen. *The New Yorker*, 13 October 1975.

No Pun Intended

William Goldman, the screenwriter of *All the President's Men*, remarks after one question too many from a *New Times* interviewer about his financial success, "You know, the unspoken reason you are here is simply that I earn a lot of money—that's why *New Times* sent you. You think I'm a whore, and your job is to make your piece exciting by going after me. That's your job, and you'll do it, and we'll never see each other again."

"William Goldman: A Talk With a Big-time Screenwriter" by David Denby. *New Times*, 19 September 1975.

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av. per cigarette, FTC Report, Apr. '75.



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